

The Aeroplane Boys



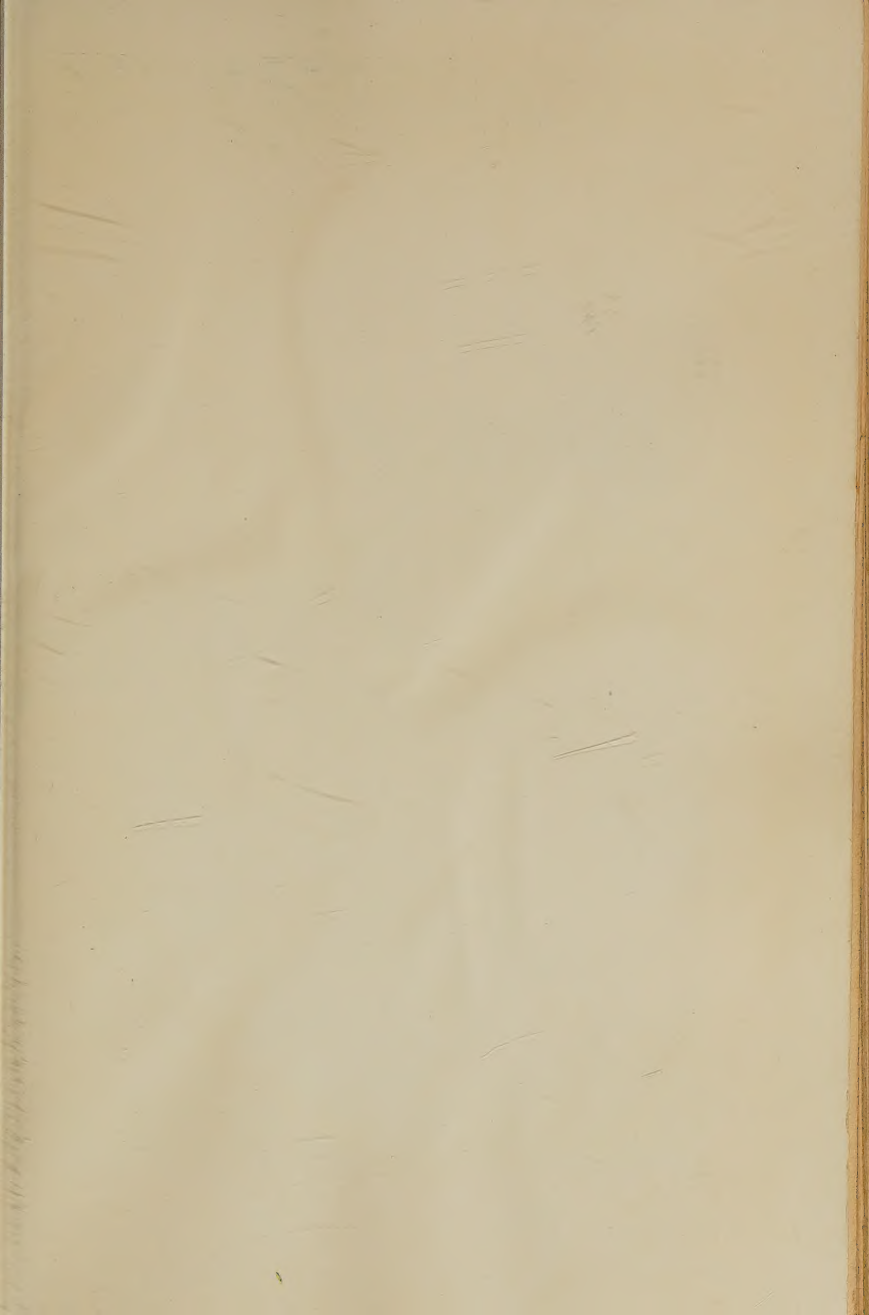
Or the
Young
Sky Pilots'
First
Air Voyage

JOHN LUTHER LANGWORTHY

Henry Aaron
Hamel,
Miss.

ΕΥΡΙ ΗΕΡ

Merry Xmas
to Henry
from
Katherine





The biplane made several furious dashes this way and that, as slants of wind caught her extended planes. [Page 152]

The Aeroplane Boys, or Young Sky Pilots' First Air Voyage

THE AEROPLANE BOYS

.. OR ..

THE YOUNG SKY PILOT'S
FIRST AIR VOYAGE

BY

JOHN LUTHER LANGWORTHY



MADE IN U. S. A.

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THE AEROPLANE BOYS

. OR .

The Young Sky Pilot's First Air Voyage

CHAPTER I.

"BIRDS OF A FEATHER."

"What are you frowning so much about, Andy?"

"And look at him shake his head, Frank; just for all the world like he's gone and lost his best friend!"

"Well, perhaps he has fellows," laughed Frank Bird, promptly. "At any rate, my poor cousin's heart is nearly broken into flinders, just because he can't for the life of him remember what he did with that wonderful little tool he invented."

"Oh! say, is that what it's all about?" cried Larry Geohegan; "I guess now, you mean the handy aluminum monkey-wrench that always kept its jaws locked after you set 'em? Too bad, Andy. Wish you luck in finding it again."

“Yes, that’s it, fellows!” exclaimed the sorrowful one, quickly. “Tell me, have either of you set eyes on the little jewel since—well, say last Saturday noon?”

“Huh! just why do you go and pick out that day, of all the blessed week?” demanded “Elephant” Small, a boy who had been given this nickname in derision, since he was anything but ponderous; and who at home chanced to be called Fenimore Cooper.

“I’ll tell you,” replied Andy Bird, promptly; “honestly then, because that’s the last time I can remember handling the same. I was tightening up a nut that had come loose on my bike—perhaps you may have seen me do it.”

“Oh! yes,” remarked Larry, the fourth member of the group, “that was the day we took that long spin on our wheels, and Frank cooked us a bully good camp dinner when we rested on the side of Thunder Top mountain, wasn’t it?”

“Sure it was,” responded Andy. “And just before we got ready to start off again I fastened that bolt. Then it was goodbye to my dandy little wrench, that I always expected to make a bushel of money patenting some fine day.”

"Well, I've got an idea, and a bright one too!" observed Elephant, calmly.

"Then it'll be the first you ever had," declared Larry, derisively.

"Don't hold your breath till you forget it, Elephant. Let's hear the wonderful stunt that's struck you!" suggested the broken-hearted loser, looking interested.

Elephant never hurried. Perhaps after all it was because of his slowness that his name had been changed so radically.

"Why, you see, it occurred to me that the old bald-headed eagle we watched circling around and around that noon, may have dodged down when nobody was looking, and carried the cute little wrench away in his talons."

This was not a joke on Elephant's part. He was never known to show genuine humor himself, although his chums frequently found cause for hilarious laughter in some of the numerous suggestions he put forward. But Elephant himself really believed in them all, marvelous though they may have been.

"Well, now that *is* a clever idea," observed Frank, always ready to lead the other on, in order to enjoy a laugh. "I tell you, that old king of the upper air must have heard Andy

boasting how he meant to follow in his father's wake, and be an aeronaut for keeps?"

He winked at the others while speaking; but Elephant of course failed to see anything of this side show.

"That's the ticket!" cried the originator of the idea vigorously, happy in the belief that for once he must have actually hit upon a bright thought; "the measly old pirate just made up his mind that he'd cripple Andy in the start, and stop all work on your wonderful monoplane. No competition allowed, understand, Andy! So he hooked the wrench; and that ties up the whole business."

"Oh! shucks! You give me a pain, Elephant," grunted Larry, pretending to double up as a boy might in the green apple season.

"Huh! it's easy to pick flaws," sniffed the other, contemptuously. "But if you don't like my clever thought, Larry Geohegan, just suppose you give us a better one. Now, none of your hedging, but out with it!"

"That's as simple as falling off a log," sneered the bantered boy, as he thrust his thumbs into the upper pockets of his coat, and assumed the air of consequence with which he loved to tantalize Elephant.

"Talk's cheap; do something, can't you?" demanded his competitor.

"Listen," said Larry, impressively. "It seems to me that something happened to Andy on last Saturday, P. M. How about that little episode of the quicksand you got stuck in, old fellow? Didn't we have to run and get a fence rail to pry you out, wheel and all."

The two Bird cousins exchanged quick looks.

"Now you're talking, Larry; because that was just what did happen to me, for a dead certainty!" admitted Andy, readily.

"Looks like Larry had struck a warm trail," ventured Frank, nodding his head encouragingly.

"Hear further, fellows," the originator of the newest clue went on saying. "I remember right now that after we pried Andy loose, he had to draw himself up by means of the limb of a tree. Also, that he straddled the same limb, so that his head hung down for a little while."

"Sure. That was when I was trying to get the rope I had tied to my wheel, over the limb, so you could pull her out of the mire," admitted Andy.

"All right," remarked Larry. "That was just the time the wrench must have dropped out of your pocket, and went souse in the mud, to sink to China. Some day you may hear of

an enterprising pigtail man over there taking out a patent on a nice little wrench, warranted never to slip while you work."

"Did you see it drop?" demanded the other.

"Nixey, I did not; still, it stands to reason——" began Larry, obstinately.

"Did you *hear* it drop?" Andy continued, positively.

"Well, seeing that you were shedding gallons of water about that time, not to mention hunks of mud, it wouldn't be funny if we failed to hear such a little thing fall into the sucker hole," grumbled Larry, driven to bay, yet not willing to change his mind.

"All the same then," declared Andy, "I don't believe it fell into that muck you call a quicksand. I've just gone and misplaced it, that's all. And some minute, when I get my mind on it, I expect to remember what I did with that little beauty."

"Meanwhile," remarked his cousin, with a smile, "we can makeshift to get along at our work with the big monkey wrench. After all, it isn't the tools that really count, but the ability to do things when you're left high and dry. Hello! Going to leave us, fellows?" as Elephant and Larry stopped at a cross roads.

"I promised to do a job in our yard today, and it's going to take me the rest of the time

to get through," announced Larry, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"And me to the woodpile for a little more muscle. So-long, boys; and don't you believe that old bald-headed thief of the air didn't understand how you meant to snatch his honors away from him. Look to his nest up on Thunder Top for your monkey wrench, Andy." And Elephant solemnly shook his head as he walked slowly away.

"What shall we do now, Frank?" asked Andy, when they found themselves alone. "Had we better go and tackle a little more work on our machine, while we wait for that cylinder to arrive?"

"You know we can do mighty little now until we install that. And I've somehow got a hunch it's about due to arrive. So what say we meander down to the station and find out?" suggested the other.

"A bully idea; so come along!" declared Andy, usually only too willing to play second fiddle when in the company of his energetic cousin.

Both were healthy looking boys. Frank's father was the leading doctor in the town of Bloomsbury, which fronted on Sunrise Lake, a sheet of water some seventeen miles in

length, and with innumerable coves along its crooked shores.

Because the boy's mother had died in his infancy with a suddenly developed lung trouble, the worthy doctor had always been unusually solicitous about Frank; and urged upon him the necessity for securing all the outdoor life he could. Nobody else dreamed that Frank looked delicate; but his father saw suspicious signs in every little "bark" he gave utterance to.

The result was that just now Frank was to be kept out of school for a whole year. His father, being a self-made man, had always believed that an education could be more practically attained from observation and travel than by study of books.

Andy, on the other hand, was an orphan. His father had been quite a well known man of science, and a professor in college. Having a leaning toward aeronautics, he finally took up the fascinating pursuit, after his wife died. A year before the time when we make the acquaintance of the boys, he had vanished utterly from the sight of mortal man, having been carried away in a severe gale while in a balloon, crossing over the line of the partly finished Panama canal.

No word had ever come back, and it was of

course fully believed that the daring navigator of the upper currents had perished at sea, or in the wilds of that tropical country to the south.

So Andy found himself left in charge of a jolly old gentleman named Colonel Josiah Whympers, mentioned in the will as his guardian. There was ample money in the estate, and every month Andy received many times more than any lad in all Bloomsbury. But he had no bad habits, and spent his money for good purposes; much of it going toward building a monoplane, which he and Frank expected to utilize in taking little flights around the vicinity.

So far as Andy was concerned, he certainly came by his great love for aviation honestly; since his father had been infatuated with the science of flying.

"Besides," Andy was accustomed to remarking, when any one challenged his wisdom in choosing such a dangerous calling; "A Bird ought to take to the air just as naturally as a duck does to water. My father had to give in to the call of the upper wild; and I just guess I've inherited the longing to soar through the clouds from him."

Andy was a merry lad, with twinkling blue eyes, and full of the joy of living. His cousin

Frank happened to be more serious-minded as a rule; and so they made a most congenial pair of chums, who were yet to have their first quarrel.

Colonel Josiah was supposed to be a rather gruff old party; but that was pretty much a blind; for at heart he was the most amiable gentleman within twenty miles of the home town. Andy could just wind him around his little finger. Having become a cripple some years back, the colonel could no longer roam the world, looking on strange sights, as had been his custom all his life. Consequently, he had to take his enjoyment in reading of the exploits of others, and in encouraging the boys of Bloomsbury to become athletes.

At many a hotly contested baseball game the old traveler could be seen waving his crutch and his cane in the air as he rooted loyally for the home team. And when he learned how Andy aspired to follow in the footsteps of his gifted father, with a sturdy intention to conquer the problems of aviation, instead of throwing obstacles in the way, the old man actually applauded his choice, and offered to assist by any reasonable means in his power.

For more than two months now the Bird boys had been industriously at work upon a model of a monoplane fashioned very much

after the style of the Bleriot which they had seen do wonderful stunts on the day they traveled down to the trying-out grounds on Long Island.

A great advance had been made in securing a new Kinkaid engine, said to be three times as light as the best hitherto made. Both boys anticipated great things when they had completed their task. Several times they had undone certain parts of the work, to go about it another way that promised better results. And now they only waited for the cylinder which had been sent for, to get their little machine into practical use.

It was far from being a toy. Both boys had gone deeply into the subject. They talked of little else, read everything that came their way, consulted every authority attainable, experimented, and planned their way carefully.

As yet the wonderful monoplane was something of a mystery. It was housed in a long, low building they were pleased to call a "hangar," and which was kept scrupulously locked at all times, whether the toilers were within or absent. This odd-looking building was situated in a field back of Colonel Whympers' house, which also belonged to the crippled traveler. And frequently he would limp out to where he could look toward the

shack, to talk to himself, nod his head, and smile, as though he expected great things some day when "his boys" had completed their task.

Walking down through the town on this July day, rather cool for the season, the cousins talked as usual of little else save the chances of their flying machine proving all that they expected of it.

"I'm willing to stake my future reputation on her being a hustler from the word go!" declared Andy, energetically, as they drew near the railroad yards.

"And I'm going to risk my precious life on her ability to stay up, once she gets away from the ground. That's as much as any fellow could say!" echoed Frank; who knew only too well what faithful labor had been put into every part of the monoplane, built for two.

"Don't I hope we'll find our cylinder has come to hand, though?" said Andy, as he began to cast his eyes around, to immediately add excitedly: "Look there, that seems to be about the size of the package we're expecting. Yes, and here's the name of the aeroplane dealer we wrote to. It's a cylinder, as sure as you live. Go and hunt up the clerk, Frank, and settle with him. Meantime I'll be ripping off this cover. so we can carry home the beauty easier."

So Frank immediately strode away toward the little freight office, to pay the bill, and settle matters. Andy, left alone, started to make use of his knife in cutting away the burlap that had been sewed around the object with heavy twine.

He was just well into this pleasant task, whistling merrily meanwhile, as was his wont, when he heard a hoarse cry of anger from some point close by.

"Hey! hold on there, you! What in thunder are you tearing open my freight for? I've got a good notion to have you arrested as a thief!" cried a voice.

And Andy, looking up in startled surprise, saw two figures bearing down under full sail, in whom he recognized his particular detestation, Percy Carberry, backed up by his shadow and crony, "Sandy" Hollingshead.

CHAPTER II.

RIVALS IN THE FIELD.

"Did you ever see such nerve, Puss, in all your life?" gasped Sandy, as the two newcomers brought up alongside the astonished Andy.

"Look at the vandal, would you, ripping the cover off our cylinder just as cool as you please! Hey! Sandy, see anything of the yard watchman around? We ought to have him pinch this thief straight away!" snapped the Carberry boy, as he glared at the stooping figure.

"Ain't he the bird, though?" went on Sandy, pretending to be surprised in turn; "And as sure as you live, Puss, it's the tail end of that wonderful Bird combination that's going to do such stunning stunts one of these fine days. Oh! me! oh! my! What a loss there'll be when he is shut up in the cooler!"

"Looky here, just explain what right you've got cutting open our freight, that's the ticket!" blustered Percy, shaking his clenched hand in front of Andy's nose.

"Take that away! I don't like it. And what the dickens do you mean saying this

thing is your freight?" demanded the threatened one, beginning to gain his feet; for he did not just fancy kneeling so close to a fellow like Percy Hollingshead, whose reputation for treachery was well known.

"Because it is our freight. Go back to school and learn to read, you lunkhead!" the other went on, seeming to get more and more angry—because they were two to one, and the freight yard was a usually sequestered place, where no one would be apt to interfere, if so be they chose to administer a drubbing to the offensive investigator.

"But it's certainly a cylinder for an airship!" declared Andy, casting a quick glance down toward his feet, where the partly uncovered object lay.

"Who said it wasn't, tell me that? Did you hear either of us whisper anything to that effect?" demanded Percy, aggressively.

"Must think you've got just a monopoly of the flying business!" sneered Sandy, puffing out his chest like a pigeon strutting along the barn roof. "Time you woke up and learned a few things, one of which is that with all your bluster and brag the firm of Bird and Bird is soon going to be a back number. Back to the junk heap for yours, Andy. Your name should be spelled Mud!"

"Oh! that's it, is it!" exclaimed the other, more than a little surprised; for these fellows had up to now kept their intentions secret. "Let me take a peep at the tag then. Didn't occur to me to think of doing that before, because neither of us ever dreamed that anybody else in Bloomsbury but us could be getting a cylinder for an aeroplane."

One glance convinced him, for the name of Percy Carberry was plainly printed on the big stout tag.

"Say, I'm sorry about this," Andy declared instantly. "Wouldn't have had it happen for a good deal. But you can see how we fell into such a blunder, fellows! I guess no harm has been done. I'll fasten up this burlap again if you say so."

It was as manly an apology as any boy would expect, and should have been met in the same frank spirit that it was given. But that was not the Carberry and Hollingshead way. They exchanged looks. Then they laughed sneeringly.

"Listen to the sneak crawl, would you?" exclaimed Sandy, with an expressive and insulting shrug of the shoulders.

"Just the Bird way, always trying to creep out of trouble. Caught in the act, he pretends it was all a mistake. But you don't pull the

wool over our eyes, Andy Bird. We're on to your curves all right, ain't we, Sandy?"

"Sure we are. A clear case of professional jealousy. Heard that we were going to have a biplane that would cut circles all around your old top, and just couldn't resist the temptation to spy on us. Hey! Puss, I wouldn't put it past him to throw some strong acid on this fine cylinder of ours, so as to make it weak, and bust, some time when we happened to be sailing around up there among the clouds!"

"You're crazy, that's what!" burst out the indignant Andy, aroused by this mean taunt and insinuation, as nothing else could have stirred his blood. "Nobody in all Bloomsbury would ever think of such a ridiculous thing but you! Why, your mind's just crammed with vile tricks like that, Sandy Hollingshead. Now, just put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

The one addressed scowled, and turned a quick, interrogative look toward his companion.

"Hear that, do you, Puss?" he gritted between his teeth. "The sneak wants to pick a fuss with us. It ain't enough for him to be caught in the act; he tries to holler 'stop thief' just like them clever pick-pockets do down in New York, when they snatch a purse and run.

What say, ought we to trim him, now that we've got the chance?"

Percy looked willing. Indeed, if there was one person in all Bloomsbury whom he would like to thrash better than Andy, it was his cousin, Frank.

Their manner was pugnacious and aggressive as they began to close in on the object of their regard. Andy believed he was in for a peck of trouble. He knew he could never hope to hold his own against the precious pair; and the worst of it all was that he had unwittingly given them a good cause for attacking him, owing to his carelessness in meddling with the wrapper of the steel cylinder before examining the label.

But Andy was game. He had a never-say-die spirit, even if not as clever a fighter as his cousin. No one could ever force him to give up so long as he had a single breath left with which to resist.

So he closed his hands, and assumed an attitude of defense. At this Sandy actually broke out into a roar.

"Look at that, would you, Puss!" he cried. "The beggar means to object to taking his medicine like a little man! All right; we'll just have to make him open his beak and swallow the bitter pill. You give him the first

dose, Puss. I'll take care he don't skeedaddle in a hurry!"

"Hold on a minute, fellows," said Andy, as though striving to gain time.

"What you got to say now, hey?" demanded the Hollingshead boy. "Get it off your system in a big hurry, for we ain't got any time to waste with you."

"I'm going to prove what I said, and that we believed this was our cylinder, or else we wouldn't have touched it," declared Andy, who had an eye beyond the figure of Sandy, though the other did not realize the fact.

"Are, hey? Well, all I can say is that you're going to have a mighty big job convincing *us* you're innocent. Hurry up!" snarled Percy, anxious to start operations, and wipe out some little matters that burned in his brain, and which had to do with certain defeats in the past at the hand of a Bird boy.

"All right. While I dropped down here to remove this burlap, just to have something to do, and feast my eyes on the lovely cylinder we wanted so much, Frank went to see the yard clerk, and settle the bill."

"Frank?" exclaimed Percy, uneasily. "Was he along with you?"

"Sure," sang out Andy, knowing that the anticipated rupture was all off. "And if you

turn your wise old head right now you'll see his well known figure sprinting this way, with the clerk following after him!"

Whereupon the other pair shot a quick glance in the direction indicated; and what they discovered somehow caused them to no longer keep their hands doubled up in that aggressive manner.

"Oh! well, in that case, perhaps there was a mistake made," Sandy hastened to say; for he saw that Frank was jumping toward them in a fashion that somehow did not appeal to his fancy—for Sandy had more or less knowledge of the excellent manner in which the tall lad could use his fists on occasion, when forced to fight.

"Yes, and next time just be a little more careful how you dig into other people's things, if you please!" said Percy, also anxious to cast oil on the troubled waters before the other Bird arrived on the scene.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank as he reached the side of his cousin, and turned a look of contempt on the precious pair.

"Oh!" laughed Andy, carelessly, so lightly did such things affect him, "they were just complaining that I'd gone and meddled with their freight, and didn't want to accept my

humble apologies. But I guess it's all right now, Frank. Has our cylinder come?

"Sure, but hasn't been taken from the car yet. Come, we'll go with Sam Harrington here, and claim it. He says we can easily carry it home with us."

Frank never gave the two standing there a single word. He understood how matters had probably been at the time of his opportune arrival.

"They didn't dare lay a finger on you, did they, Andy?" he asked, while they walked after the yard clerk toward a certain car nearby.

"Well, no," admitted the other, quickly, "but the storm was just going to break when you showed up. But what do you think of their nerve in getting a biplane ready to show us up? Say, things look like they might be getting warm around old Bloomsbury pretty soon. I can see the time coming when the town will be a regular aviation center, with aerodromes and hangars dotting the landscape. And we're the pioneers of the great uplift movement!"

"That sounds pretty good—uplift movement when applied to aeroplanes and dirigible balloons is fine! But don't let your imagination run away with you, Andy. Perhaps we

may get dropped out of our aircraft the first shot, and that squash would put a dampener on all flying in this section. Even Percy's easy going mother will cut off the spending money. And that aviation field you have in your mind's eye can never crop up."

"Well, anyway, there's our cylinder; and just now that's what ought to interest us more than anything else. A biplane, he said! Think of that, Frank. Just like Puss Carberry to want to outdo everybody else. He knew ours was going to be equipped with a single pair of planes; and of course he falls into the error of believing he can beat us by doubling up. His old game, Frank; but when did it work?"

"Not very often, for a fact," replied the other, as he bent down to lift one end of the package the clerk pointed out to them.

Presently the freight bill having been settled the two boys walked off bearing between them the precious piece of machinery that was needed to complete their labors of two months. With that placed in its proper position, and several minor things adjusted, they believed the monoplane would be ready for testing.

And what a great day it would be for the Bird boys when they were able to take their first little flight near the ground. Andy

thrilled as he talked of the glorious prospect ahead, and now attainable, since the last difficulty seemed to have been smoothed away.

They took their time in walking back to the Whympers place. Several boys whom they chanced to meet, asked questions concerning the time when they expected to try out the new flying machine. But to these the cousins gave noncommittal answers.

“Think we want a crowd of fellows gaping, and bothering right at that critical time?” declared Andy, as they left a group of comrades on the road. “I just can’t get that old story of Darius Green and his flying machine out of my head. Gee! I hope we don’t come a cropper like he did, and smash everything! But here we are at the road that leads down to the field where our hangar stands. Turn in, Frank.”

Passing alongside the garden, they presently struck the gate that opened into the broad field which they expected to use for their circling, once they got the monoplane to working.

“Here, drop her while I find my key,” said Andy, suiting the action to the word. “Three to one it’s up at the house, in my other clothes that I had on last night when we were working here. Ain’t that just a blooming shame

now, that a fellow has to sprint all the way there and back?"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Frank, suddenly, and there was that in the tone of his voice to startle his cousin, who stopped still, while in the act of hurrying away.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Did I happen to give you the key now?"

"Not that I remember. But you needn't run to the house. We can get in without any key this time, I guess," said Frank, with an angry gleam in his dark eyes.

He pointed to the door, and looking, Andy saw that the staple holding the padlock had *been drawn*, so that it could be pulled with the slightest effort!

CHAPTER III.

TRYING OUT THE ENGINE.

“Oh! Frank!”

Andy had turned white, and looked weak. A dreadful foreboding seemed to have suddenly seized upon him. It was as though a cold hand had been brought in direct contact with his wildly beating heart, stilling its pulsations.

But Frank was not affected in the same way. His face flushed with anger. They had, as if by mutual consent, lowered their burden to the ground upon making this startling discovery. Frank was therefore free to act; and his first movement was toward throwing open the unfastened double door of the shed, to plunge inside. Whatever there was to discover, Frank meant to know the worst immediately.

There upon the floor was the precious monoplane, so nearly finished that it looked as though it might be ready to start the engine at a minute's notice.

But there was something wrong about it. Andy had followed his cousin into the place, and his horrified eyes quickly discovered what had been done by the vandal hands of those

who had found entrance during the preceding night.

"The planes have been cut into ribbons! Oh! what a shame! All our work just ruined by some sneak and coward! Frank, ain't it awful?" he exclaimed, clenching his hands in a manner that told of great excitement.

"Hold on," said the cooler one, raising his hand; "it's true that the canvas of the planes has been spoiled utterly; but if that was the whole thing I wouldn't care so much. Let me examine the engine first."

Eagerly he removed the canvas covering the motor. Andy went and opened the great doors wider, so that he could have an abundance of light. Then, with his heart in his throat, so to speak, Andy hovered near, waiting for the dread verdict.

Presently Frank looked up.

"Oh!" cried the other, as he saw that his cousin was smiling, "tell me nothing vital has happened, Frank! They didn't dare hurt that little darling Kinkaid engine, did they? No, your beaming face tells me so. Is that all the damage they did?" and he pointed to the cut canvas of the two planes.

Frank nodded his head.

"I can't find anything more, old fellow," he said, cheerily, the cloud dissipated from

his brow that had a minute before been so threatening.

"But how did that come, d'ye think?" demanded Andy. "Seems to me I can give a right good guess who did this dirty job, even if they covered up their tracks like they always do; but why would they stop at smashing our planes, when they could put our engine on the blink so easy?"

"Well," observed Frank, thoughtfully, "we happen to know that some people I won't mention have more than their share of caution. While we mightn't make much fuss about the planes, if the engine had been tampered with we'd be apt to complain to the chief of Bloomsbury police, Mr. Waller, and have him investigate."

"But what could have been their object?" Andy complained, as he looked closer at the slashed material covering the framework of the planes.

"Just malicious deviltry, I guess," replied Frank, gloomily. "They were curious to see what we were doing with our monoplane, and forced the lock last night. Then the temptation was too great to be resisted. They just *had* to do something to satisfy that craving for ugliness. Besides, don't you see, it would

delay us; and that would allow them to steal some of our thunder."

"Sure enough," cried Andy, "I never thought about that. Everybody knows that we expect to give our little trap a trail soon. And what a feather it would be in the cap of Puss and Sandy if, instead of the Bird boys, *they* sailed over Bloomsbury first! Oh! what schemers they are! Always jealous of everybody else, and wanting everything to come their way!"

"Well, after all, there's really no damage done," laughed his cousin.

"Ain't, eh? How d'ye make that out?" asked Andy, ruefully handling the tattered material of the planes.

"Why," said Frank, "have you forgotten what we decided about this stuff—that it was a bit too flimsy, and not to be depended on, when a fellow was risking so much? And didn't I go and order another lot through Spencer's drygoods store last week? They ought to have it in by tomorrow, or the next day at most; when we can get busy, and cover these wings with canvas that will hold."

Andy had his turn to laugh, which he did most heartily, as usual.

"What d'ye think of that, now? After all, they only helped us cut the old stuff away, to

make ready for the new. Of course, they don't happen to know about your order. And they think we'll have to wait a week before we can get anything worth using. And come to think of it, that's the way the schemes engineered by Puss Carberry generally do turn out. They kick at the wrong end, like a gun that isn't pushed up against the shoulder. Well, this is a joke on them, after all."

"All the same, their intentions were bad enough!" declared Frank, sternly.

"Sure they were," Andy echoed. "In the first place they busted open our locked doors, and looked our machine over. That was treachery of the first water. Then they tried to hold us back, so they could show the town people that the Bird boys weren't the only smart chaps in Bloomsbury. That was about the way Sandy bragged. And Frank, what d'ye think he accused me of wanting to do?"

"Stealing his freight, you said," returned the other.

"Huh! worse than that," grumbled the other. "He declared he believed I meant to throw some acid on their cylinder, so that it would eat in, and make the blooming thing crack, just when they were up in the clouds, boring for altitude."

"Just like the mean skunk. Those sort of

things are always in his mind; and so he suspects others are just as nasty about doing such stunts," said Frank with an expression of disgust.

"Just about what I told him to his face," Andy observed, quickly. "And as sure as you live, here's the evidence of it right before us. Ten to one Sandy slashed these planes with his knife. Wish he'd happened to drop it here; wouldn't I like to pick it up, and tell him where I found it?"

As he spoke, Andy started to look around the shop. His comrade presently heard him give utterance to a sudden exclamation, as he stooped over.

"Found any knife?" asked Frank, humorously.

"Well, no; not a knife; but I have raised a knave of spades. Look here, neither of us ever had a pack of cards in this shanty, did we? Then what is this doing here, tell me?" and Andy excitedly held up what he had found.

Frank thought enough of it to take the card from his cousin's hand, and look it over. Then he laughed.

"Same old story," he said, nodding. "Did Puss Carberry ever try any dodge without having it backfire? Now, I would be willing

to take my affidavit that there was no such card lying around loose here yesterday when we worked at our monoplane. So it goes to show that it must have been pulled from the pocket of one of our midnight visitors, perhaps when he was getting out his handkerchief or a knife."

"But can we prove it on them?" asked Andy, hungrily, as he glanced once more at the cut planes.

"Perhaps we can," replied Frank, thoughtfully, wrinkling his brow as he reflected. "In the first place, we must try and learn whether either of those fellows own a pack of cards marked on the back like this. You see it is an Indian figure, and underneath are the words 'The Red Hunter.' I don't know for certain, but I've got a hunch that Puss brought this pack back with him, when he came from the city last."

"Yes. Go on," said Andy, deeply interested.

"All right. Then in some public place, where there are a number of people present, we must make sure Puss has the cards with him; after which we will accuse him, and make him show whether this one card is missing from his pack."

"Gee! you know how to show up these

things all right, Frank!" exclaimed the delighted Andy. "Suppose you get that brain-box of yours busy on another little mystery we know of now. Honestly, I have a hunch that if you would only *try* you could discover what became of my darling little monkey wrench. I'm like the baby and the soap you see advertised—I'll never be happy till I get it."

"I don't believe you'll give me any rest till you do remember where you put that plagued little tool," declared the other, laughing.

"Hold on, don't you go to calling it names," said Andy, aggressively; "because it's no fault of the wrench that it's missing. I'm the one to blame, I reckon. But I'll never give up trying to recollect where I put the thing away so safe that I've even forgotten the combination."

"Yes," smiled his cousin, "I've known people to do that before. Perhaps I may have done it myself. But if it comes to the worst, I suppose you can have a duplicate made that will answer just as well?"

"Oh! I reckon so," replied Andy. "But think of the time and worry that thing cost me, not to mention the expense. Besides, I just don't know how we're ever going to make that first ascent minus that invaluable tool."

“Well, forget it just now. We’ve sure got all the trouble we want to install this important part of our machine. I’ll drop in at Spencer’s place the first time I’m in town to-day, and see if the bolt of stuff has arrived. It would be great good luck if I found it had, Andy.”

Throwing off their coats, the two boys got to work. And presently they were as busy as beavers, crawling about the apparently clumsy object which occupied so much of the shed’s interior.

Colonel Whympers had had the place constructed especially for the purpose of furthering their plan. There never was a guardian more indulgent than this old traveler, now reduced to hobbling around with a crutch and cane. And Andy never tired of letting the old chap know how much he appreciated his generous heart.

Of course the structure was flimsily built, as most hangars are, being intended merely as temporary resting places for air craft. Many times Frank and his cousin knew that the town boys had come out of their way to peer through the crack in order to gratify their natural curiosity. But up to now no one had ever attempted to injure anything connected with the monoplane, or its shelter

Several hours passed away. The engine was now complete, and Frank had even given it a trial spin. The sound of its humming was pleasant music in the ears of these aeroplane boys, for they had a severe case of the up-to-date disease. Andy came by his naturally, inheriting it from his father; but with Frank it was acquired from his reading, backed by a desire to see strange places of the great world, hitherto inaccessible to ordinary travelers.

"Say, that's great!" cried Andy, as he stood and watched the easy play of the lightest little engine ever invented.

"Works like a charm," said the proud Frank, standing there, adjusting the automatic oiler, ready to drop a little lubricant wherever the friction came sharpest. "And even now I've only got half the power turned on. Tomorrow we'll place the bicycle wheels under the framework; or if we happen to feel like it, that might be done tonight."

"Tonight?" echoed the other. "Sounds like you expected to camp out alongside the little charmer."

Frank turned upon him, and his dark eyes gleamed as he replied.

"And that's just what we're going to do, my boy—stick by our machine day and night

until we make our first flight. I'd never feel safe in bed after seeing how easy it would be for those savages to injure her. What if they were mean enough to file partly through a wire support of the planes, and we never noticed it? It would hold out till we put extra pressure on it, and that might be five hundred feet up in the air. No, one of us must be here all the time!"

"You're right, Frank. I'll bring over blankets from the house, and we can just bunk out here. Won't be the first time either that we've kept house together, not by a long shot. But you figured that card business down fine. Only wish you would turn that genius on the puzzle that's bothering me."

"Oh! rats. Suppose you let that thing sleep for a while, Andy. You said yourself you'd be sure to remember some minute what you did with the wrench. Now, let's figure how we're going to get any grub while here."

CHAPTER IV.

A MIDNIGHT ALARM.

"I tell you what," suggested Andy; "let's cook our supper here. What's to hinder, when we've got a stove handy, and there's no great amount of gasoline around? I'm just hungry enough to want to see you throw things about and wrestle with a regular camp dinner. What say, Frank?"

His cousin seemed to reflect.

"Oh! well, I don't mind," he presently replied. "Nobody ever knew me to refuse a chance to do my own cooking. But only this once, Andy, remember. We'll be too busy to-morrow to spend time over a fire. All that will come in time, when we're off on some of the bully little trips we expect to take, when we get used to piloting our flying machine through the clouds."

"All right. In the morning we can get breakfast at the house, one at a time, while the other stands guard. After all I guess the only danger is leaving things alone at night. There's a good moon tonight, too. But since you agree to my game, I'm off to get some grub, and that dandy aluminum camp outfit the colonel gave me on my birthday. Just the

chance to break it in. What will I fetch along to eat, Frank?"

"Oh, anything you can grab," laughed the other, knowing that Andy, being a good feeder, the real difficulty would be in his gathering enough for half a dozen fair meals. "A beef-steak wouldn't go bad, with some spuds and beans from the garden. And don't forget the tea, on your life!"

"Listen to him, would you?" jeered Andy, stopping in the doorway to answer. "Why, to hear him talk you'd think he was an old maid. Shall I fetch the cat for you to rub as we sit before the fire? If I had my way it'd be coffee every meal. But I suppose I'll have to give in like I always do," and he ran off laughing.

When he came back later he was ~~fairly~~ loaded down with numerous packages, while over his back he seemed to have a little bag thrown.

"Take some of these traps, will you, Frank? That's the little aluminum cooking outfit in the sack. It nests in a mighty small space, you see, but answers for two persons. But you've seen it before and admired it without stint. Just the thing to carry up in an aeroplane, where every ounce of extra weight counts. And I'm pleased to know that you're going to be the one to take the new shine off my birthday present

from the best of guardians, Colonel Josiah Whympers."

Andy generally pronounced the full name of his guardian. Somehow, he seemed to feel that the old gentleman rather liked to hear it. And besides, it gave an added spice to what he was saying.

Whatever Andy did was right, according to that indulgent party. There might be a limit to his belief in the boy's capabilities; but if so, it had never as yet been reached.

So, while Frank was once more looking with admiring eyes on the frying pan that could shed its handle, the neat little shiny kettles nesting within each other, the utensils for coffee making, and tea, too, if wanted, not to mention cups and platters, all made of the strongest aluminum, Andy jogged back to the house for another load.

"Here, hold on," said Frank, looking up when the other had deposited the second assortment of stuff, "d'ye want to swamp us outright? I declare if you haven't gone and brought out enough for half a dozen already. Look at the steak! How in the dickens are we going to make way with all that, not to speak of cooking it?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you we're going to have

company," said Andy, wickedly, as he made ready to shoot off again.

"Colonel Josiah Whympers' coming to join us in our frugal repast?" asked Frank, a look of pleasure on his face.

"Just that. When he heard what we meant to do he got fidgetty at once, and finally threw out such broad hints that I had to ask him to join us. Besides," added Andy, with a look of what his cousin called "soft sawder," and which was meant as oil is used to allay friction; "he's been complaining a good deal lately because he never had a chance to taste your cooking, after me bragging about it so."

"Ah, get along with you," laughed Frank, pretending to throw something; "but I say, Andy, while you're about it just borrow the family frying pan from the cook, because this little one would never do for such a gigantic steak, especially since I see you brought a lot of onions along and want them fried, too."

"O. K., boss! All shall be done as you order, after being so kind as to not kick over the traces because I've invited a guest. But *such* a guest! They destroyed the pattern after Josiah Whympers was made, I reckon. I'm going to get blankets this turn and that blessed frying pan ditto," after which he shot off on a run.

Andy did things with a rush, in which he was ever a marvel to his slow friend, Elephant Small, whose failing seemed to be just the other extreme, as he crawled along after the style of a snail.

Frank always carried out everything he attempted well. If he worked at machinery he was conscientious about every trifling bolt and nut. If he played baseball he did it with his whole soul and made as near a success of his work as was possible. And now, when he was elected "chief cook and bottle washer," as Andy called it, of the supper that was to be prepared, he set about the job just as an experienced cook would have done.

Evening had come. Already the July sun was hovering close to the horizon. The day had been singularly cool for a summer spell, though doubtless it would grow hot again by the morrow.

At any rate it was not a serious task standing over a fire and looking after the various vessels that simmered and bubbled. Then the fine steak was slapped on a pan that had already been well heated, which was Frank's way of cooking such a delicious morsel. It immediately began throwing off a most appetizing odor that kept Andy groaning and wondering how long he could stand it.

The onions, too, had a scent all their own. And as if this were not enough, Frank, in honor of the expected guest, had allowed Andy to have coffee, so that there was another fragrant smell added to the lot.

Pretty soon a thumping announced that Colonel Josiah had arrived, and Andy jumped up to welcome the old man. He came in, sniffing the air vigorously and manifesting the most intense delight.

"Reminds me of many a scene in my checkered past, lads," said the old gentleman, who was a smooth-shaven party, with long white hair, and eyes that had not lost the fire of their younger days. "And I'm glad I held off until the feast was nearly ready, because I just couldn't stand that long. This looks homelike. Glad to be with you, my lads. It was nice of you to ask an old codger like me. Perhaps I can repay you by relating a number of events this reminds me of."

That was his one weak point. His past had really been so filled with adventures without number that everything served to bring some striking scene to his mind. But boys with red blood in their veins never tire of hearing about such things. And these two lads were built along such lines, for they deemed it a treat

whenever they had a chance to listen to his thrilling recitals.

And the colonel never forgot to impress a moral to his tales. Old age was beginning to give him a different view of life from what he may have entertained at the time these scenes he mentioned were being enacted.

They sat there for nearly two hours talking. From his own past experiences the old man deftly turned the conversation in line with their aspirations, and asked many questions concerning what they expected to do when they found they could manage their aeroplane, which he had examined with considerable curiosity, and not a few words of praise.

Finally he announced that he had better be returning to the house. Andy would not let him go alone, though the moon was shining brilliantly.

When he came back later he found his comrade deep in the job of cleaning up.

"Oh, what's the use doing that tonight?" asked Andy, prone to want to put off things to another day that ought to be done now.

Frank knew his little weakness only too well.

"Not much," he said, decisively. "We'll find enough to do in the morning. Here, you get a towel and start in to wiping these things.

And with such a dandy outfit I do hope you take a little pride in keeping things clean and bright."

"Huh!" grunted Andy, "thought that was the best thing about aluminum—that a fellow never needed to clean it up."

"Listen to him, will you?" laughed his cousin; "perhaps you had a sneaking notion, too, that it might get the spuds peeled and do all sorts of stunts. Make up your mind, my boy, nothing is ever gained without some work. Give that dish another rub while you're about it, Andy, and then set it back on the stove to warm up. Soon be through here and then, if we feel like it, we can get at those bike wheels that are to go under our framework, according to the design we're following after."

Although possibly Andy may have confessed to being somewhat tired, still, the fever was rioting through his veins, and he could not say no, when Frank proposed anything connected with the completion of that wonderful monoplane that haunted his very dreams, so much was it in his mind during his waking hours.

Accordingly they set to work. Frank had arranged his plans and knew just how this thing and that must be managed in order to secure the greatest amount of success.

"Now she looks like the real thing!" declared Andy, enthusiastically, when the little wonder had been duly elevated and fitted with the wheels that were to prove so useful in starting off and in landing.

"Watch how the engine works again in this new position," said Frank, as with a few deft turns of his hand he set things in motion.

The quick pulsations of the motor thrilled them. Small wonder then that these enthusiastic novices of the air navigation idea could hardly tear themselves away from a contemplation of their prized aeroplane and think of such an ordinary thing as securing some sleep.

"Come, look here, it's going on midnight," declared Frank, finally; "and we must get our bunks ready to turn in. I'm going to tumble over on this pile of planks here. Nothing like the soft side of a board for a bed, they say."

"And since I went and fetched this cot out, thinking you'd accept it, why, sooner than see it lie idle, I'll dump my blanket in there and curl up. Got the bar across the door, Frank?" asked Andy, as he started to yawn again.

"Sure," replied the other, "and the little window partly open, to give us air, for it's close in here. Now turn in and don't let me hear a yawp from you till morning."

“Oh, I’ll sleep as sound as a nut; always do. That is, if I don’t get to dreaming something about that darling little——” but as Frank threw a block of wood across the shed and made the speaker duck his head, he did not finish his sentence.

Presently all was quiet within the long shed, save the regular breathing of the two boys. The moonlight sifted in through the open window and lighted up the queer workshop after a fashion, so that the great batlike object occupying so much space could be dimly made out.

Perhaps an hour had gone by. From without there came only such sounds as one might expect to hear on a July night in the country, for the place of Colonel Whympers was outside of Bloomsbury and really surrounded by fields and woods.

Something suddenly aroused Frank. He hardly knew himself what it could have been, but as he sat upright in his blanket he believed he heard loud voices somewhere outside. Then something that seemed to be very heavy came down with a loud impact that awoke even that hard sleeper, Andy.

“What was that?” he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright.

Frank, quick to act, was already out of his warm nest and making a bee line for the win-

dow, which happened to be in a quarter that could be reached without his stumbling over the monoplane occupying the middle of the place.

Of course, not to be outdone, Andy tumbled off his cot, climbed to his feet and as the doors happened to be more convenient to him, he was quickly throwing the heavy bar aside. This done, the impulsive Andy rushed straight outside, clad only in his pajamas as he was.

CHAPTER V.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SKY.

When Andy thus wildly rushed out of doors he fell over some object which he did not chance to see. Perhaps in his excitement he even imagined some one had given him a clip alongside the head with a club, for he struck the ground with a bang that must have made him see stars.

"Frank! Frank! Come here, quick!" he shouted.

The other, who had been thrusting his head out of the window of the hangar, immediately made a break for the door. Doubtless he half expected to see his cousin wrestling with some daring intruder, whom he had caught in the act of setting fire to the shed or some such caper.

"Where are you? What's going on here?"

Calling in this strain Frank arrived in time to see Andy still on his hands and knees just as he had fallen. He seemed to be staring up at the starry heavens as though he had taken a sudden intense interest in the planets of the universe.

"Did you see anything?" he questioned, as

he managed to clamber to his feet and clutch hold of the other.

"Not a thing!" came the ready reply; "but it seemed to me I heard shouts. And they seemed to be getting fainter and fainter, as if the fellows were running away."

"That's it, Frank, voices that sounded like they were sailing along overhead!" exclaimed Andy, excitedly.

"What's that?" demanded the other, turning upon him; "overhead, you say? Ginger! Now that you mention it, seems to me there might be something in that. But how could anybody get above us, when there isn't a single tree in this big field?"

"Frank," Andy went on, earnestly, "I saw something just disappearing over yonder, where the woods begin to poke up in the east. And I give you my word that was where the voices came from!"

"Disappearing? Do you mean over the tree tops, Andy?" cried the other, just as if the announcement he listened to nearly took his breath away.

Andy nodded his head several times, while his face, seen in the moonlight, appeared to be covered with an eager grin.

"Yep, went over the tops of those same trees just like a bird—poof! and it was gone. I

couldn't make head or tail out of it, because, you see, I was nearly standing on my own head just then. But it wasn't a bird, I'll take my affidavit on that! It sure must have been some sort of flying machine, Frank!"

His listener whistled to express his surprise.

"Here, let's go and get some clothes on over these zebra stripes," he suggested. "Then we can come out and look into this thing a little closer."

In less than three minutes they issued forth again, better able to stand the chilly air of the night.

"Did you hear anything more than the shouts?" asked Andy, as they emerged.

"Why, yes; some sort of racket woke me up. Don't just know what it was, but I thought somebody might be banging on the side of the shack, and I jumped. I guess that's what woke you, too," continued the taller lad.

"But Frank," declared Andy, impressively, "I couldn't say for certain, and yet it seemed to me as I lay here, after tumbling over that wooden bucket I forgot to carry indoors, I heard some sort of sounds that made me think of the popping of a little motor!"

"A motor!" cried the other, "and up there in the air, too!"

They stared hard at each other. Some star-

ting thought must have instinctively lodged in each brain, for almost immediately Andy went on sadly, saying:

“Just to think, they’ve beaten us a mile! And after all the talking we’ve gone and done, too. However will we hold our heads up after this?”

“See here, you don’t mean that those fellows have got their biplane rigged up already and are soaring around in the moonlight?” demanded Frank.

“Well,” Andy continued, “it looks like it, don’t it? Something that can fly and carry passengers certainly passed over our hangar just then. And not only that, but they let loose at us, no doubt intending to smash in our roof with a great big dornick.”

“Hold on, you’re jumping too far ahead, Andy. Let’s go slow and not get off the track so easy. If you were on the witness stand could you swear that you saw a biplane just disappearing over the trees yonder?”

“Well, no; perhaps not exactly,” said the other; “but I saw *something* that was moving along just as neat as you please.”

“Yes, and the moonlight is mighty deceiving, I know,” remarked Frank. “But we’ll say that you did see something, that might have been a flying machine or a cloud. Will

you declare that you heard the popping of a motor?"

"I think I did, but perhaps it may have been the blood rushing through my brain, for I came down pretty solid. Still, it wouldn't surprise me if we learned, after all, that it *was* a motor in an aeroplane. Then think what they tried to do to us, will you?"

"There you go, Andy. Don't be a false alarm all your life. We're going to investigate that same noise presently, when we've threshed this other thing dry. It may be that they've gone and done it. But if two green-horns can start up in an aeroplane by moonlight and sail around just as they please, flying must be easier than I ever dreamed of, that's all."

Frank did look puzzled. He could not bring himself to believe such a wonderful thing had happened. Knowing both Percy and his crony as he did, he doubted their ability to accomplish the feat in broad daylight, let alone night, with its deceptive moonlight.

And that was why he frowned as he tried to figure the thing out.

"We both heard the big row," he mused. "Then Andy here declares he saw *something* floating off above the trees yonder; he can't say for sure whether it was an airship or a

nighthawk. And he kind of thinks he heard something like the crackling of an aeroplane motor! Now, what happened? That's what we've just got to find out."

He looked around him.

"Yes," he continued, as if speaking to himself, "I'm nearly sure that crash came from over yonder to the west. It seemed to reach me by way of the window, and that was why I made for that opening in such a hurry. Thought some fellow might be trying to climb in there and had fallen back."

Again he cast his eyes upward, then slowly described a half circle.

"Andy says *it* disappeared over that clump of trees, which is almost due east of here. And I thought I heard the crash over at the other side of the shack, making it almost west. Now, that sounds reasonable. If they dropped something, meaning to hit the roof of the hangar, and undershot the mark, it would have fallen to the ground to the west of the building!"

"Yes," said Andy, who had been listening eagerly, "and you remember, there's a little pile of lumber lying there, which we meant to use if we had to enlarge the house. It must have struck those boards, Frank!"

"That's a clever thought," admitted the other, "and one I didn't clutch myself. Let's

meander over that way and take a little observation. What say?"

"I'm with you every time," declared Andy, quickly. "I never could stand having two mysteries bothering me at once. It's enough to be always wondering where that blessed little monkey wrench could have vanished to."

"Come on and drop that, if you please. Life is too short to be everlastingly whining about lost opportunities and monkey wrenches and such things," said Frank, leading off as he spoke.

"Oh, splash! You haven't got a grain of sentiment about you, Frank. Everything is too practical, according to your way of thinking. Now to my mind, there's nothing prettier in the world than a cleverly constructed wrench that knows its business and refuses to get out of joint just when you need it to hold most."

But Frank had declined to listen to his "chaff," as Andy would have called it himself. Already the other had advanced toward the opposite side of the structure. Here, in the fairly bright moonlight, they could see the pile of planks that had been left in the expectation that the building might have to be enlarged sooner or later.

Straight toward these Frank strode. The

nearer he came to the pile the stronger grew his impression that they must be near a plausible solution of the mysterious racket.

"It came from somewhere about here, I should say," he remarked, as he halted by the heap of boards to glance around.

"Yes, but so far as I can see there's no big stone lying on top of the pile. Guess after all it was a mistake. We must have dreamed it," said Andy, ready to give up.

But Frank was very stubborn. Once he had set his mind on a thing it was hard indeed to change him. And somehow he believed more than ever that if they looked close enough they would find the explanation of the queer noise in this quarter.

"Strange!" he muttered, evidently chagrined because he did not seem to discover what he had expected as soon as he had thought would be the case.

"No big stone here, that's sure!" declared Andy, picking himself up from the ground.

"What was that you stumbled over?" asked his cousin quickly.

"That? Oh, only a bag of sand that swift bunch of masons who laid the foundations of our shack forgot to carry away with them. They're a punk lot. Might have knocked my nose that time and started the claret to run-

ning," and he gave the object of his disgust a vicious kick with his toe, after which he immediately began a war dance around the spot, for he had quite forgotten that he was wearing a pair of deerskin moccasins just then and had stubbed his toe against the hard contents of the bag.

"What are you giving me?" demanded Frank. "A bag of sand! Why, you know very well those masons never brought their sand in bags. It came in a load and was dumped right over at the other side of the shack."

"All right. This is a bag, I tell you. Perhaps it's got gold dust in it, for all I know. Feels hard enough for that. I'll put you wise, Frank. Just you try giving it a good kick, if you want to see," grumbled Andy, nursing his injured toe.

"A sandbag! Whew! I wonder——"

Frank did not finish what he had on his mind, and his companion looked his surprise at seeing him drop down alongside the object in question, which he began to handle eagerly.

Then, to the utter amazement of Andy, he made to pick the heavy bag up and start away with it.

"Hey, come back here!" called the other, trailing and limping after him; "what under the sun are you going to do with that thing?"

Want it for a pillow? Maybe you think we can make a breakfast off it? Why, what ails the fellow? He acts like he'd struck a prize, that's what!"

"Come along inside and I'll show you something," called the other over his shoulder, which, of course, only added new fuel to the fire of curiosity that was already raging in Andy's soul.

When he got inside he found Frank in the act of scratching a match, which he immediately applied to a lamp, one of those by which they were wont to work of nights.

There upon a rude table where they planed and sawed Andy saw a small, stoutly made canvas bag that had what seemed to be a handle on one side.

"Well, I declare, it's got a label of some sort tied to it! Nice, pleasant fellows these, trying to smash in the roof of our hangar and then sending their compliments along with it!" Andy exclaimed, for like a flash it had come to him that the sandbag had been hurled down from above!

"Here, listen while I read what it says!" exclaimed Frank.

"Balloon 'Monarch.'

"DeGraw, Pilot.

"Launched at St. Louis July 4. Sixty-seven hours up. Last

bag ballast but two. Please notify committee through New York newspapers.”

“Butt in; I’m listening, Frank!”

Then the two boys stood there and stared at each other, as though hardly able to grasp what the whole thing meant, but the one positive fact that stood out was that this sand-bag must have come down from a passing balloon!

CHAPTER VI.

BLOOMSBURG IS BOOKED FOR FAME.

"Please pinch me, Frank!" said Andy, weakly.

"What for? Do you think you're asleep?" asked the other, himself hardly able to believe what his eyes had read.

"It seems like a dream. I just can't understand it all. Yet there's the message all right that dropped down from the clouds. And we sure heard voices. Tell me I'm not seeing things that don't exist, Frank. Say *something*, for goodness sake!"

Frank did manage to arouse himself at last.

"Well," said he, slowly and seriously; "let's look at this thing a bit closer. We were waked up by a big bang. Then we thought we heard voices that gradually grew fainter. You got the notion in your head you glimpsed some sort of flying thing that disappeared over the tree tops to the east. Finally, we picked up this sandbag, made just like those we saw with that balloon that was down at the aviation meet on Long Island. That about covers the business, I reckon."

"Covers it, yes!" cried Andy, now growing

excited; "but it gives me a creep just to think how that balloon, drifting all the way from St. Louis, happened to pass straight over *our* heads! And then what a streak of luck to have the pilot drop his message at the door of our hangar. Why, it was just like he knew there were a pair of aeroplane boys here ready to grab his message as they would a gold nugget."

"Right you are, Andy," observed his cousin. "And do you know I take this as a sign that we're going to have good luck with our aeroplane. Things are coming our way."

"I should say they were. First some fellow sneaks in here and cuts the wings of our bird to flinders. Then these balloon racers get the notion that our camp would be a rattling good place to drop a message to their committee. Do we carry out their suggestion, Frank?"

"Do we?" echoed the other, instantly; "well, what would you think of our chances among the profession if we declined to assist fellow aviators hustling the news along? Why, I'd get up out of a warm bed any time of night and wheel twenty miles to carry such a message as that."

"Then you'll go to town with it and send to the papers in New York?" demanded Andy.

"Yes, right away; so they can have the news in the morning issues, if it isn't too late. I'll

hunt up Casper Dunbar. You know he has some sort of connection with the *Herald*, and never fear but that he'll find a way to tell the the whole story."

Frank was nothing if not energetic. Even while he was speaking he began to hurriedly dress himself.

"I suppose," ventured the other, cautiously, as if an idea had suddenly come to him, "our names will have to be mentioned in the telegram?"

"We'll leave that to Casper. Ten to one he'll make it a point to say that the boys who had the message left at their door are known as local aeronauts," replied Frank, secretly chuckling, for he could guess what was coming.

"Well," said the other, presently, "would you mind asking Casper if he seems bent on mentioning us in his dispatch that he get my name as Andy and not Andrew? You know nobody but the dominie calls me that, and I've always detested the name. It belonged to an uncle who after all turned out bad. Spell it for him, Frank—just plain Andy Bird."

"All right, just as you say. But there's no need of you sitting up to wait for me. I may be gone quite a while, because you see

Casper would want to hear all the particulars. Go back to your cot, Andy."

"Perhaps I will," replied the other, who was, however, evidently in no frame of mind to woo the gentle goddess of sleep, for he continued to shake his head from time to time and mutter words covering his astonishment over the "miracle."

"Say," he finally burst forth with, "we are lucky and that's a fact. Suppose now that pilot of the *Monarch* had just knocked at the door of the Carberry home instead of here, wouldn't that have queered us? Well, anyway, he knew a real bird-boy had his nesting place where he saw the roof of our hangar. I'm going to let Mr. DeGraw know some day that I consider him a mighty far-sighted gentleman."

"Shucks! It was just an accident, pure and simple," laughed Frank, "and we'll let it go at that. I'm ready to skip off now. Is your wheel in condition, Andy?"

"Plugged that rear tire only yesterday and made a cracking good job. Yep, she is holding like a house afire. Good luck to you, Frank. And be sure that you spell the whole name out for Casper. I'd hate to see it Byrd or Budd or something like that."

"You certainly take the cake, Andy. Don't

you know that a bird by any other name would fly just as high? But I'll impress on Casper the enormous crime he'll be committing if he gets a single letter wrong. By-by!"

Wheeling the bicycle out of doors, Frank threw himself into the saddle after the manner of an accomplished rider and was off.

The moon still rode high in the clear summer sky, so that, after a fashion, it was almost as light as day. Frank quickly found himself on the road. Then it was an easy dash into town and out along the other road, which would speedily bring him to the home of Casper Dunbar.

Left alone in the shed, Andy did return to his cot, for it was rather cool at that uncanny hour of the night. Sleep, however, was the very last thing he considered as he lay there, a thousand thoughts flying riotously through his excited brain.

The strange passing of that balloon racer, which had covered something like a thousand miles in its long drift across country, filled his mind with awe.

If a mere bag of gas, the sport of every shifting wind, could be guided thus far by the skill of its pilot, in rising and falling in order to continue a direct easterly course, what ought not a genuine aeroplane, equipped with the

lightest and most complete engine ever constructed, be capable of doing?

In imagination the sanguine bird-boy saw himself and comrade sailing over tracts of wild country never before looked upon by mortal eye, learning the strange secrets that Nature had hidden from mankind all these thousands of years.

"Why," said Andy, talking to himself in lieu of any better audience, "there can be nothing beyond the reach of a flying machine properly constructed and run by experienced bird-men. It can pass over burning deserts, where caravans have perished. It might even sail to the South Pole and beat Peary at his own game. And of all the pursuits in the world, to my mind that of an aeronaut is the finest. No wonder my poor father was drawn to take it up by his studies. And nothing shall ever keep me from following the same profession, unless I meet with a knockout in the start, which I hope won't be the case."

After what seemed to be a long time he fancied he heard Frank returning. But as more minutes passed and no one knocked at the door, across which he had drawn the protecting bar, after the instructions of his mate, Andy concluded he must have been mistaken.

"But it did sound like the tire of a wheel

had hit the side of the shack. May have been a squirrel playing about, because I've seen lots of 'em," he muttered as he sat up, leaning on his elbow.

Perhaps it was, but all the same, when the little jar came again, Andy was impelled to climb out of his simple bed and move over to the window.

Possibly he could not wholly forget that on the preceding night some persons had paid a secret visit to the home of the new monoplane and shown a vandal spirit in cutting the wings to shreds.

What if they meant to come again on this night? Andy's imagination was doubtless pretty well fired after this strange visit from the racing balloon. He also knew the character of the two rival aviators and to what low depths they had often sunk in order to get even with those they chanced to be at odds with.

But all seemed well. The moon hung there like a great silver shield. An owl in a neighboring tree whinnied like a horse, calling to his mate. Everything seemed peaceful enough and with not a sign of intruders anywhere.

Ah, something certainly moved over yonder. Andy had a thrill as he looked with his whole energy. How deceitful that bright moonlight

was after all! Why, he could see to read almost, and yet at fifty feet away it would be next to impossible to decide whether the black object he saw were a stump or a cow lying down.

Yes, the thing *was* moving and coming straight toward the hangar, too. What if it turned out to be either Percy or his shadow, Sandy Hollingshead? Would they dare attempt another mean trick similar to that which was played on the preceding night?

Andy was gritting his teeth and trying to decide whether he ought to shout to let them know their presence was known, when he heard a low signal whistle.

Then after all it was Frank coming back. The two Bird boys had studied telegraphy together, as well as "wigwagging" and the use of the heliograph, as used by the signal corps of the United States army. They had arranged a code after the manner of Morse, by means of which they could communicate with each other, no matter what the distance separating them.

"Hello, Frank, that you?" Andy now asked, softly.

"What's left of me after banging along the road on a flat tire," came the immediate answer.

"Gee! did that plagued plug let go after all my pains to set it?" said Andy, regretfully, for he did not like his cousin to deem him an indifferent workman.

"It sure did before I'd gone two hundred feet along the road. But then I wasn't going to let a little thing like that keep me back," replied the other, as he came in through the door Andy opened.

"Did you manage to wake him up? I tried once, I remember, and it was a healthy old job. Casper sleeps like a log," Andy went on.

"Well," replied Frank, smiling, "it was no easy task; but I pounded on his door with a club till I made such a racket a neighbor called out to know if anybody happened to be dead. I told him I was afraid Casper must be. But just then he poked his head out of a window and told me not to worry, that he had only been napping."

"Wow! he sure is the limit;" declared Andy. "And then, when he heard what news you brought, did he dress and come down?"

"I guess he did, and was tickled to know that Bloomsbury was going to be on the map again. He asked me a heap of questions, not alone about the message and the dropping of the sand bag, but about our monoplane, and what we expected to do after we got it ready. Why,

Casper even remembered that your father had been the well known aviator and balloonist, Professor Bird, once of Cornell."

"Oh! did he mention that?" breathed Andy, who was always visibly stirred whenever any one spoke of his father. "And Frank, I do hope he gets the name straight. I'd hate so much to see it misspelled; more than ever if he means to mention that I come by my craze naturally."

"I impressed it upon him good and hard; and Casper promised to print it in big capitals, so that there would be no mixup. And now I'm going to turn in again. It's a long while to dawn, and what's the use of our staying up?"

Frank was as good as his word. In ten minutes the shed was wrapped in silence; nor did anything else occur to arouse the boys until the sun, peeping in at some crack, chanced to fall upon the face of Frank, and aroused him.

Andy went in to breakfast, and after he returned to the hangar Frank followed suit; for that was the arrangement, since they did not mean to leave the precious machine alone if it could be helped.

Then they started to work again, for numerous little things remained to be done ere the aeroplane could be deemed in absolutely per-

fect condition, with every wire taut as a piano string, and the engine working smoothly.

It must have been along about eleven in the morning, when Andy, who had been bending over holding some parts that Frank was adjusting raised his head.

“Somebody coming,” he said, “and it sounds like the rat-tat of Colonel Josiah’s crutch and cane. Say, he’s certainly making speed, all right, like he wanted to see us in a hurry. Wonder what can have happened now, Frank?”

The other immediately crawled out from under the engine of the aeroplane, and hurried to the door, which he opened; to discover that it was the crippled veteran traveler sure enough, and that he was showing signs of some great excitement.

CHAPTER VII.

A SENSATION FOR OLD HOME WEEK.

"Hurrah! Great news, lads!" shouted the colonel, as he waved a paper over his head, when he could stop his forward movement for a second or two.

"Oh, what if it is about father?" gasped Andy, turning pale, for the unrevealed fate of the daring aviator had always borne heavily on the poor lad's mind, and in the silent watches of the night he often allowed himself to think of the great joy that would come to him should his parent ever be found again.

Frank turned to him quickly.

"Don't allow yourself to think it can be that, Chum Andy," he said, softly, for he knew what the dream was that his cousin kept nurturing deep down in his heart, and also how impossible of fulfillment it must ever be; "I have an idea it's only something connected with our little adventure of last night. But here's Colonel Josiah at hand and we shall soon know the worst."

"Bully news for you, my bold young aviators!" cried the old man as he came hobbling along, his smooth face aglow and his long

white hair floating over his shoulders. "And I made 'em do it, too! When they heard about that balloon dropping that message and how Bloomsbury was destined to become famous as the center of aeronautic doings, they just couldn't hold back. And so they had the printer strike off fifty of these circulars, and they're going to be posted all around the county."

"What did I tell you?" said Frank, smiling, but nevertheless he reached for the paper the old man extended with a hand that shook a little.

"Why," he said, "it's issued by the Committee on Sports for the Old Home week of this month, when they expect to have all sorts of athletic stunts going on to interest the crowds of people who will flock to Bloomsbury."

"Just so," observed the old man, with a broad smile. "And I finally showed 'em what a tremendous thing it would be to have an aviation meet at the same time."

"An aviation meet!" ejaculated Andy, his eyes almost popping out of his head with new interest.

"And we talked it over," went on the old man, "with the result that a prize is to be offered to any one who first plants an Ameri-

can flag on Old Thunder Top, landing on the little plateau where the foot of man has never yet trod, from an aeroplane built in Bloomsbury and piloted by Bloomsbury boys!"

"Whoop! It's great! And did you originate that clever stunt, Colonel Josiah?" shouted Andy, wringing his guardian's hand as though it were a pump handle.

"To be sure I did," replied the veteran, proudly. "I've had it in my mind for some little time now, and what you told me this morning about that other machine being constructed here just capped the climax, as I may say. But she's all fixed now, lads. The prize is to be a silver cup. And unless I miss my guess, that trophy is bound to be kept in the Bird family, to be handed down to future generations of bird boys."

He did not mention the fact, but Frank suspected it on the spot and afterwards discovered it to be true, that his money had gone to purchase the said trophy and have it suitably engraved.

"When is this great day to be?" demanded the excited Andy, leaning over, the better to scan the little poster that told in as few words as possible what the several conditions of the contest would be.

"July fourteenth, and at two p. m. the word will be given to go," replied Frank.

"Whew! That gives us a scant five days to get ready and one of them Sunday, too, when there's nothing doing. Can we get the machine in trim and master her by that time, Frank?" asked his cousin, anxiously.

"We certainly can and will!" came the steady reply from the boy who believed in his own powers to accomplish things. "Besides, you must remember that our only competitors are likely to be Puss Carberry and his crony Sandy, who know far less than we do about running an aeroplane."

"That's right," agreed Andy, his confidence returning again, as it always did after being bolstered up by his chum's unwavering determination and faith. "With only those two against us seems to me we ought to have a walk-over."

"Now, don't jump to the other extreme and underrate the enemy," warned Frank. "You know that's always a dangerous business. Besides, Percy has a certain amount of perseverance and cunning that often carries him along. He's in dead earnest about this aviation business and bent on making a success of it. I never knew him to show so much interest in anything before. And it strikes

me as funny, now that I look back, how neither of us ever suspected that he was up to beating us at our own game. He's a sly one, all right."

"Yes," Andy went on, "and we might still be as much in the dark as ever if it hadn't been for my silly blunder in starting to open his package of freight, without examining the tag first. That gave the secret away and put us on to their slick game."

"Perhaps," replied his cousin; "not that it would make much difference in the end, though, for they couldn't have kept their secret much longer. But I'm going over to town now and see if that canvas has arrived at Spencer's Emporium."

"This time," said Andy, "my wheel ought to hold out, for you put the plug in yourself, and I humbly confess that I'm far from a success as a mechanic. My jobs look well, but hang the luck, they don't just seem to hold good."

Frank was quickly off. He never felt so happy before in all his life. Everything seemed to be as fine as the weather. Their little monoplane was about ready for its trial spin, once they fastened the new canvas to the planes. There was this competition, which pleased him more than words could tell. And

then the indefinite future beckoned beyond, holding all sorts of wonderful possibilities for a couple of bold spirits, fully devoted to solving the secrets of the upper air.

"I only hope the weather is just like this on that same Old Home day," he was saying to himself, as he pushed on the pedals and went spinning along the road to town. "Not a breath of air stirring around and just a few clouds lazily floating up yonder above the crown of Old Thunder Top."

He turned to cast a glance toward the peak that hung over the waters of peaceful Lake Sunrise, and memory carried him back to several occasions when he had been baffled in trying to scale the upper tier of frowning cliffs, that up to now had made the top of the peak inaccessible to climbers.

It was a positive fact that so far as was known to the oldest inhabitant of Bloomsbury no one had ever attained that summit, though many had tried. The upper cliffs made a complete circle around the crown and were something like eighty feet in height.

It had long been the one desire of Frank's boyish heart to find out some method of surmounting the difficulties that had thus far debarred any one from planting a flag up on that lofty summit.

And to think that the idea had also come to Old Colonel Josiah, who possibly in his younger years may have climbed the Matterhorn or scaled some of those awful peaks in the northern Himalayas.

It would indeed be a proud day for Frank if he were ever allowed to put foot on that elevated plateau of solid rock, up to now only the lonely eyrie for the eagles that sailed through the blue vault of heaven

And strangely enough at about that same moment Andy was standing outside the shed that sheltered the idol of their hopes, with his eyes also glued upon the indistinct crown of Old Thunder Top.

In imagination doubtless the sanguine bird boy was seeing their monoplane gently dropping like a feather on that hitherto inaccessible rocky fortress, soon to yield its secrets to modern, up-to-date methods of exploration.

And again would the honored name which his late father bore be crowned with a measure of success.

“I’d just be as happy as a clam at high tide,” muttered Andy, “if it wasn’t for that measly monkey wrench getting away from me. Never had such a sad thing happen. And just when I had saved enough money to get out a patent, too. But, as Frank says, there’s no

use crying over spilt milk. I can make another model if given time. And then who knows but what it might pop up again in some unexpected place. Sometimes I am a bit careless, I admit. But better that than to believe it went in that mud to land in China, as Larry Gohegan said."

From the contemplation of the mountain peak he allowed his thoughts to slip off to that other subject which was never long out of his mind.

"If we can drop down on that plateau so easy," he said to himself, Colonel Josiah having betaken himself back to the house and his book, "what's to hinder our scouring the whole range of the Andes in the hope of finding some trace of any one who might have been lost there? I haven't said much to Frank about that, but it's the dream of my life. If I only could know how he died—oh, if I could only learn where his poor body lies! That uncertainty is what hangs like a load on my soul. But some day, please Heaven, I mean to go down there where he was last seen and devote my whole energies to solving the riddle."

When Frank came back, which was shortly, he found his cousin tinkering at the planes and getting the last remnant of old canvas off in

readiness for the new material soon to be fastened there.

"I see you got it all right, Frank," remarked Andy, cheerily, for it was not in his nature to remain for any length of time in the dumps.

"Yes, it came in yesterday after all. But then we haven't really lost any time, you know. And by tomorrow morning I calculate we'll be in good trim to make the first real test of our ship in her natural element, the air. I tell you, Andy, the prospect looks mighty good to me."

"And to me," promptly said the one addressed. "Given two days to make little flights around our field here, and we ought to be able to rise to higher things."

"Well, I learned something just now that rather took my breath away," Frank went on saying.

"What was that?" asked the other, curiously.

"You remember that Puss was off somewhere a week ago. I heard that he was down in the city, but no one knew what for. And now it develops that he spent two days around the aviation field over on Long Island, watching the way they ran the aeroplanes. And it

is said that he went up several times with Curtiss in one of his biplanes, so as to learn how to handle the wheel!"

"You don't say?" ejaculated Andy, his eyebrows denoting the most intense astonishment. "Well, in that case he has got the bulge on us, for a fact. Why, if he had such an experienced aviator for a teacher Puss must be in the swim right now. And we've just got to dig for all we're worth to get on even terms with him."

"Don't worry," said Frank, composedly. "In the first place I don't believe the story. If he went up with any one it was a man less famous than Curtiss, who certainly wouldn't bother taking a boy up with him while exhibiting his machine and what tricks it could do. Even if Puss did go up, that doesn't make him an aviator. We're going to learn our little lesson by slow degrees and without the help of any outsider, too."

They were soon busily employed in cutting out the wings and starting to secure them to the planes. It was a particular job, for upon those essential parts of the monoplane almost as much depended as on the engine itself. If the latter broke down while in flight or stopped while "banking" the aeronaut could save himself by volplaning down toward the earth; but

should his planes suddenly give way, he would drop like a plummet!

Frank was a cautious lad, who never forgot that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. And he would certainly omit nothing that could add to the safety of himself and his chum.

They had just concluded it must be time for dinner, when Andy, who had started for the house to wash up and be the first to partake, uttered a loud cry that brought his companion hurriedly forth.

"I guess it's all true, Frank," the other was crying, as he pointed his finger at some unwieldy object that seemed to be moving unsteadily along just over the tops of the trees where the balloon had vanished; "because there's Puss and Sandy in their new biplane, starting out to make their first little flight. Oh, my! look at that dip, would you? I thought it was going to smash that time, but they lifted her all right. You see, Frank, they've got us beat a mile in being first afloat!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NOVICE FLIGHT OF THE BIPLANE.

There no longer existed the slightest doubt in the mind of Frank Bird that their rivals had indeed stolen a march on them and were the first of the Bloomsbury brand of aviators to mount upward in the realms of space.

"It's Puss Carberry beyond a question, and he's flying all right," he said.

Naturally there was a trace of disappointment in his voice, for he had never dreamed, while working at the monoplane, but what he and his cousin would be the pioneers along these lines in that part of the state.

Still, Frank was a good loser. He knew how to fight down that feeling when it threatened to grip him.

"They certainly deserve a lot of credit," he continued.

"What for—stealing our thunder?" demanded the indignant Andy.

"Oh!" Frank remarked, laughingly, "I guess they had as much right as any one to build an aeroplane. And if they managed to keep the secret it was to their credit. Perhaps we've been doing a little too much talk-

ing. And it looks as if Puss did pick up some points down at the aviation field. He seems to be managing the biplane fairly well for a new beginner."

"Well," admitted Andy, grudgingly, "he is going around after a fashion; but lots of times it makes a swoop down at the ground like it meant to whack them into a cocked hat. But somehow the fellow at the wheel, which I reckon must be Puss, manages to recover just in time."

"And he's doing better all the while," Frank pursued, still watching. "When he gets used to it that fellow will run an aircraft decently, and we'd better make up our minds to that. I only hope we come out as well when our turn arrives to make the trial spin."

Indeed, the biplane seemed to be behaving quite handsomely. Its evolutions, as it was sent around the field where Puss must have taken it for a trial, were by degrees assuming a more positive form. It no longer dodged and shot sideways, but acted more like a wild colt that has recognized the hand on the bridle rein.

So deeply interested were the Bird boys in watching that they even forgot how the lunch hour had arrived. The ringing of a bell from the back stoop of the Whympers domicile

aroused them, and Andy, with a look of disappointment on his face, trotted off to eat first, since they would not leave the hangar together.

"I wonder," said Frank to himself, noticing his cousin's downcast appearance, "whether that boy is really disappointed because we're not the first in the aviation field here at Bloomsbury, or if he feels a bit sore because the Carberry biplane failed to get in trouble on its novice flight. But I'd better get to work on those planes. We must have our machine ready today and if tomorrow looks good, try it out."

So he went energetically to work, trying to put the other aeroplane out of mind for the time being. And yet it might have been noticed that several times Frank found an excuse to issue forth from the shed on some errand, and that on every occasion his eyes naturally sought that region where the strange bird had been so lately soaring.

On his last trip it had vanished and he supposed that the boys, satisfied with having shown what they could do, had alighted again.

Just then Andy came hurrying forth, devouring a wedge of pie as he advanced and crooking his neck in the vain endeavor to locate the biplane.

"Where did she go to?" he exclaimed.

“Don’t tell me they took a cropper and that it’s all off? That would be a big disappointment, for I’ve made up my mind that I don’t want to see Puss and Sandy get hurt. Because, in that case there couldn’t be any race on Old Home day. And I’ve just set my heart on beating ’em to the top of the mountain.”

Frank laughed.

“I must say your heart has become mighty tender of late, Andy,” he remarked, as he washed his hands at the tin basin they kept at the shed. “But make your mind easy, for I reckon they only dropped down to get dinner. You’ll see them enough this afternoon. And ten to one they fly over us here, just to laugh.”

“I’ll make sure to be inside then,” grumbled Andy, dejectedly. “But get along with you, Frank. Colonel Josiah is dying to ask you a whole lot of questions. He tired me out, and besides, I wasn’t feeling like explaining just how we came to play second fiddle to those sneaks.”

Evidently Andy felt pretty “sore,” as he expressed it. When Frank later on came out of the house he found that Elephant Small had arrived, being deeply interested in the construction of the monoplane.

Elephant had, of course, seen the biplane in

the air. He had even increased his customary snail's pace in order to reach the field of the flight before the boys came down.

Andy had evidently been pumping him for all he was worth, because just as Frank arrived the newcomer was saying:

"Why, yes; they did come down with something of a bump, but nobody was hurt, and Puss said he'd know how better next time. She's a dandy, too, boys, I tell you. Of course, not any finer looking than the one you've got here, but built along entirely different lines. Ginger! I'd be tempted to go into this flying business myself, only I'm afraid the pace would be a little too hot for me."

Those who knew Elephant's slow ways and habits of procrastination would have certainly agreed with him. He could never keep up with the procession. Aviators must necessarily be built on the order of athletes, for their very lives may depend on instantaneous action and speedy thought that springs from intuition. It is not the profession for a lazy or clumsy individual.

Soon the two were hard at work, with Elephant looking on, crouched in his favorite attitude of sitting on his haunches and encircling his knees with both arms.

The talk, of course, soon turned upon the

great race of such aircraft as had been fashioned by enterprising sons of Bloomsbury.

"It's going to be a pretty race," ventured Elephant.

"Huh!" grunted Andy, without looking up, "that remains to be seen. I've got a hunch right now that it will be a clean walkaway; if a fellow can say that about an aeroplane that makes circles around another aircraft."

"I was just thinking, Andy," continued the other, reflectively and soberly, as if he really meant every word, "that when you do make that landing up on the little plateau crowning Old Thunder Top, you can satisfy yourself of one thing anyhow."

Andy did raise his head at that.

"Now, what in the dickens do you mean, Elephant?" he asked.

"Why," went on the other, to the secret amusement of the listening Frank, "don't you recollect what I said yesterday when we were talking about your missing that cute little aluminum monkey wrench you invented—and how I believed that old robber of a bald eagle might have grabbed it, because it was shiny. Well, you know that pair have a nest somewhere on the cliffs up on Thunder Top. What's to hinder you taking a peek to see if I wasn't right?"

"Oh, rats!" said Andy, with a shrug of his shoulders. "You know I don't take any stock in that yarn, Elephant. I'm only afraid Larry hit closer when he said I might have dropped that jewel out of my pocket at the time I was hanging from that limb over the sink hole."

Frank put down his knife which he had been using.

"Now that the subject has come up again," he said, quietly, "I might mention something that occurred to me while you were in at dinner, Andy."

"About my lost wrench?" demanded the other, quickly.

"That's it. Stop and think now—do you remember laughing at me for trying my big tool on that tiny nut that holds the main guy of the rudder?"

"Sure I do," replied the other, promptly.

"And you did the job like a charm with your little wrench, for I complimented you on the way it worked. You remember that, of course?" Frank went on.

"Sure I do," repeated Andy, his eyes beginning to glow with anticipation.

"Well," Frank continued, "it wasn't last Friday that happened, nor yet Saturday. I'm positive it was on Monday of this week, just

the day before the glorious Fourth, and if you doubt it I can prove the same."

Andy sprang up, cracked his heels together, and gave a shout.

"You're right, Frank; it *was* Monday!" he cried.

"Say, what's all this row about?" demanded Elephant, looking puzzled. "I don't see what difference it makes whether it was Friday or Monday, so long as the little wizard wrench is lost, dead sure."

"Why, you slow coach!" cried Andy, "don't you understand that if I sure had it right here in the shop on Monday it never could have been lost on Saturday. So both you and Larry guessed off the hook. It didn't drop from my pocket into that blessed old muck hole."

"And then the old eagle couldn't have lifted it either!" observed Elephant, with a look of disappointment on his face, as he saw the one bright idea of his life vanishing in smoke.

"And if I had it here it ought to be around somewhere!" observed Andy; whereupon he started overturning everything that chanced to be lying on table or floor, until Frank begged him to desist or else they would find themselves in a peck of trouble regarding other things that could not be found.

"But hope has revived, anyhow," asserted

Andy, doggedly, "and I'm never going to give over the hunt. That invaluable little tool has just *got* to be found. And I'm the Peary that will get there sooner or later."

"All right," said Frank; "but I can see Larry coming whooping along the road out yonder on his wheel, and he looks as if he had something to tell us. Yes, whenever Larry grins like that all over his face he is bursting with information. So get ready to be surprised, fellows."

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEWS LARRY BROUGHT.

"Don't you take too much stock in Larry bringing news," observed Andy, still letting his eyes rove all around the walls of the shed, as though striving to discover somewhere the object of his dearest wish.

"Oh, come!" said Frank, "you're going to run him down just because his guess about your wrench falling in that mudhole turned out bad. Why, at the time I thought it must be the truth."

"But Larry is always a false alarm," declared Andy. "Like as not now he thinks we don't know a thing about that plagued old biplane, and he's just bursting with importance."

The object of this conversation now came wheeling up to the door of the shed. He did seem to be trembling from some cause or other. It might have been his rapid pedaling over the road from town or else the immensity of the news he was bearing.

"Hey, fellows!" he cried, as he came puffing inside, "don't suppose you've heard about it."

"Punk! You're a back number, Larry,"

exclaimed Andy, quickly. "Why, we watched 'em circle around the field from here; and Elephant saw 'em come down. You can't tell us anything new about Puss Carberry's new biplane, I guess!"

Larry looked surprised.

"Why," he said, "I hadn't heard anything about that. Do you mean to tell me they've been and beat you up? And actually got back to solid earth again without breaking their necks? Well, that is news!"

"But look here," said Frank, "you were going to tell us something. Has there been another prize offered? Perhaps there may have cropped up a dozen other aeroplanes that are being built for the competition. Seems to be the rage around Bloomsbury just now. What is it all about, Larry?"

"Oh! what I had to tell don't seem to have any connection at all with airships," said Larry. "The funny thing about it is how they ever managed to keep it a secret all morning, up to noon. And Chief Waller has been working hard all the time. Possibly now, you may have seen some of his men passing along the road here, mounted on motorcycles? They're scouring the whole blessed county for the rogues!"

"Rogues!" exclaimed the impetuous Andy;

"now you have got us wondering to beat the band! What's going on in Bloomsbury? Sure the old town is waking out of her Rip Van Winkle sleep with a rush."

"You just bet she is," affirmed Larry, with a grin. "And when Old Home Week comes along, everybody in the whole U. S. will be talking of the great doings here."

"But get along with you, Larry. Sure, you're slower than molasses in winter. Do you want to have us drop in a fit? Can't you see we're just trembling with anxiety? No more chaff now, but put us wise!" and Andy shook the newcomer, as though really believing he ought to be aroused from a trance.

"There was a robbery last night!" began the other.

"What! in Bloomsbury?" asked Frank, surprised, for such a thing was seldom known in connection with the town on Lake Suprise.

"Leffingwell's jewelry store was entered, and cleaned out! They say the thieves must have taken thousands of dollars' worth of stuff. They carried it off in two suit-cases, too; though I don't know just how the police found that out. It was kept quiet up to noon in the hope that the rascals might be apprehended. Every neighboring town has been informed by 'phone or wire. Police are on the lookout

everywhere, trains are being watched, and it is believed that the thieves are still hiding somewhere near Bloomsbury, waiting till the chase cools down to make their escape."

Larry got this off much after the manner of a small boy at school. He had evidently rehearsed his speech while booming along on his wheel.

The three boys stared at each other.

"Why," remarked Frank, "seems to me they're beginning early. We had warning that the chances were there would be a raft of thieves wander this way next week, on account of the big crowds expected. Everybody was told not to leave things around loose, and to lock their houses when out on the streets. But these sly fellows knew enough to slip in ahead of time, when folks were napping."

"My! but they must have made a great haul," observed Elephant. "I've often looked in at that window display of diamonds and bracelets and watches, thinking that it must be worth a heap. And do you mean to say they're all gone up the flue?"

"Cleaned the safe out. They were experienced crooks too, because they knew how to open that big safe without the police hearing the explosion!" Larry went on.

"Explosion!" echoed Andy, his mouth opening in astonishment.

"Sure. They blew the doors off with dynamite, covering the safe with blankets in the most up-to-date style. Must have timed it to go off just when that freight puffs up the hill, and makes such a big row. It's waked me many a night."

"I know," declared Andy, "it goes along at half-past two in the morning. Then it must have been at that time the job was pulled off. And there isn't any train until six. Are they sure the robbers didn't go on that?"

"Yes," Larry continued, "because Chief Waller happened to be at the station then, and nobody got on that he didn't know. Besides, they have found out several other things."

"Tell us what they were, please?" asked Elephant, edging closer.

"Well, a little runabout of an auto was found broken down and abandoned not more than half a mile away from here. It was headed out of town. No owner has turned up for it as yet. And the Chief says he is sure it must have belonged to the two robbers. Something happened just when they were leaving town with their boodle; and they had to duck into the woods to hide."

"Well, I only hope they find 'em then,"

said Andy. "Because I don't just like the idea of having such fellows hanging around. Makes you have a queer feeling if you happen to be out late on the road. Ugh! guess I'll stick close till they get some news about that bunch."

"I heard the Chief had a clue that may turn out valuable," Larry went on. "On the floor of the back room where the safe was located they picked up a crumpled paper. It didn't belong to anybody in Leffingwell's, and is believed to have fallen out of the pocket of one of the robbers while at work. You know that could happen, boys."

Whereupon the Bird cousins exchanged glances, and smiled; for they remembered the card which had been found on the floor of the shed, and which they felt positive had been carelessly dropped by one of those vandals to whom they owed the destruction of the canvas covers of the planes.

"But what was the paper?" questioned practical Frank.

"Oh! yes," Larry replied, "and that ought to interest you boys, because, you see, it was a pilot's license, granted by some French Society of Aviators to a Jules Garrone. So it looks like the owner might have been reduced to robbing a store. Of course, when

they find out who he is, and where he stays, he'll have to explain how his license happens to be lying around loose in a place that has been robbed."

"What beastly luck," grunted Andy. "Here we're just breaking into the honored ranks of air navigators, when some scamp has to go and disgrace his calling. Don't I hope they get him, though, and send him up for a good term."

"You blood-thirsty chap," laughed Frank. "Just as if it had anything to do with the honor of the calling we've adopted as our own. Every profession has its black sheep — ministers, lawyers, doctors, all alike. All we have to do is to make good, and leave the rest. But let's get busy, Andy. If we expect to have everything in apple-pie trim by tonight, we have little time to lose discussing things, even if they are thrilling."

Frank seemed to be a trifle more thoughtful than ordinary as he continued his interrupted labors. Andy kept up a running fire of comment with the other boys as long as they remained. Finally both Elephant and Larry went away, and the cousins were left to their work.

Although they stepped outside about every half hour religiously during the afternoon,

and each time scanned the tree-tops over in the quarter where the biplane had appeared just before noon, they saw no more of the flier.

Frank was of the opinion that, having tested it out, Percy Carberry had discovered certain weak stays that needed strengthening; and that the owners of the new air craft were putting in their time doing this.

Andy showed his gratification plainly.

"I was afraid they'd just come hovering over us here," he said, as the sun drew closer down toward the horizon, and the biplane had not been sighted. "And it would have badgered me some to have the guys mocking us, and taunting us. Now they can't go up, because there's too much wind for greenhorns to buck against. And by tomorrow we're just going to be on the map ourselves, mark me."

"We certainly are," added Frank, "if nothing happens to prevent it."

"Why," said the other, "what could happen to break us up?"

"Oh! I don't know, but there's many a slip between the cup and the lip." And that was all he would say; but Andy felt that his cousin must be thinking of something definite, to have spoken as he did.

Evening arrived. As before the boys took

turns going in to meals. This time Andy insisted that his cousin be the first to break his fast.

"I'm as hungry as a wolf," he admitted, "but all the same you've just got to go in first this time. We've got gasoline in the tank, the planes are finished, and if it was tomorrow, there's nothing to prevent our shoving the little beauty out into the open right now, and taking a slant off over the field. However will I manage to sleep tonight, I don't know."

Frank, knowing the stubborn nature of his cousin, did not waste time in trying to combat his wish, but started for the house at once.

CHAPTER X.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE.

"I just knew how it would be!" said Andy, as he came in an hour later, after having eaten his dinner at the house.

Frank, who was still pottering around the aeroplane, though careful about having the lamp anywhere close to the gasolene tank attached to it, looked up.

"What's ailing you now?" he demanded. "Got a line on that disappearing monkey wrench yet?"

"Shucks! I only wish I had," replied his cousin. "But I was referring to what Larry told us about those bold, bad men, who cleaned out poor Leffingwell. You know he said they must be hanging around somewhere not many miles from Bloomsbury, and that the police were hunting everywhere for traces of their hangout?"

"Why, yes, I believe he did say something like that," Frank went on. "But what's that worrying you for? Have you got an idea you know where they're hiding? If so, why not call police headquarters up on the phone, and let the Chief know? I'm sure he'd thank you, Andy."

"It wasn't that at all, you see," explained the other. "But what Larry said has got on my nerves, just as I expected. I'm seeing things, that's what!"

"Things that don't happen to exist, you mean, I reckon?" asked Frank.

"Well, I suppose so. That's always the way with me when I get anything on my mind. I just imagine I see it everywhere. Now, would you believe it, when I was coming across the field just now in the dark, for the old moon is just peeping up over the trees, I thought I glimpsed a figure that scuttled out of sight."

"You did, eh?" said the other, eyeing him closely.

"Sure," replied Andy. "Of course it was an optical delusion, as Professor Jarvey at high school would say, and there wasn't anything there at all. But it gave me some start all the same. Hope I don't dream about those desperate chaps tonight. If I wake you up by shouting, you'll know it's only a mild attack of nightmare. Just douse me with the contents of that water pail, and I'll come out of it all right. I always do."

"I'll remember," grinned Frank. "And as the bucket is nearly full just now, make up your mind, my boy, that you're in for a jolly good swim if I'm compelled to upset it over

you. I'd advise you to go slow about dreaming such things."

"I will," remarked Andy. "You give me cold feet already; but that isn't a circumstance to what a beaut of a chill I'll get if you douse me tonight."

"But see here, perhaps you *did* see something?" observed the other, seriously.

"Nope," said Andy. "The more I think of it the more I'm inclined to believe it was just my imagination that made me think I saw a fellow duck down behind that fence corner."

"Did you go over to investigate?" continued Frank.

"Nixey. That would have been your way, I know, old fellow; but I don't happen to be built along the same plan. If it was one of those crooks I didn't want to meet up with him; and if my brain was only working overtime why, what was the use bothering."

"You can argue yourself out of any hole, Andy. But I think I'll just take a little walk out, to see if I can glimpse anything," and Frank picked up his cap.

"Be careful, Frank," said the other, a little alarmed. "Just remember Larry said the Chief called them desperate characters. So if you do run up against the precious pair, let 'em have the better part of the road. We're

not looking for any share in that reward, you know."

"Oh! I'll take care," smiled the other, as he passed out.

Left alone, Andy grew nervous. He would go to the door and listen every minute or so; for he had taken the pains to close the means of entrance, and put up the long heavy bar that secured it from the inside.

Finally, unable to stand the suspense any longer he picked up the big monkey wrench.

"I think I'd better step out myself," he muttered. "Perhaps Frank may run across those scoundrels, and need help. There, was that a call? Did he mean to signal to me then?"

His heart beating wildly, Andy halted **just** back of the doors. If there came a repetition of the sound he meant to throw them open and rush out, regardless of everything.

Instead there came a faint tapping, just as though some little woodpecker were getting in his work, boring holes in which to hide grains of corn. Andy listened.

"It's our code," he whispered, with a sense of relief. "Frank is there, and he wants me to open up. Yep, there it goes again—'open the door!' Hello! Frank, is that you, and are you coming in?"

"It's all right, so open the door, Andy," came the voice of his chum.

"Did you find anything?" demanded the keeper of the fort, as Frank glided in through the opening.

"No, not exactly," replied Frank, dropping into a seat.

"But you say that as if you weren't quite sure," expostulated his cousin.

"I went over to the place you mentioned. There was certainly nobody there," continued the late scout, positively.

"Just as I said," declared Andy, "it was one of my freaks. I'll just have to put a brake on that imagination of mine. It'll get me in trouble one of these days."

"But the grass seemed trampled down, and in one place I found where it looked as if somebody might have been stretched out looking through between the bars of the fence. I struck a match, and picked up this thing."

Frank held up a partly burned cigarette.

"Which shows," he went on, "that after all perhaps some one *was* hiding in that corner, watching the hangar. And when you stopped to look, it alarmed him, so that he scurried off."

"A cigarette, eh? Well, we know who uses that sort of thing all the time. And his name

is spelled Sandwith Hollingsworth, too," Andy declared emphatically.

"Perhaps," admitted Frank; and he would not continue the discussion further.

Andy knew from the signs that his chum must be thinking about something connected with this matter; but if so, Frank kept his suspicions to himself. He really had nothing sound on which to base them, and did not wish to alarm Andy unnecessarily. Andy was an explosive sort of fellow, and at times only a spark was needed to set the magazine off.

Both the boys expressed their intention of getting to bed early, being tired, and not having slept any too well on the preceding night.

Frank took to his board pile again, though Andy had fetched out more blankets so that he could stack a lot beneath him to relieve the hardness.

He heard the regular breathing of his cousin close by, long before he could get to sleep himself. The moon had begun to mount quite high, and sent more or less light through the little window. Frank several times raised himself on an elbow, and looked around the dim shop; but nothing seemed amiss.

Finally he must have dropped off, nor could he imagine how long he had slept, when he

opened his eyes suddenly. It was no loud bang, as on the preceding night, that aroused him this time. Indeed, he did not believe he could have heard any sound at all, and that it was only some intuition that made him awaken.

He seemed to just be possessed with a conviction that some sort of danger was hovering over them. There was no tangible reason why he should believe this; but the fact seemed to be impressed upon his sub-consciousness as he lay there and listened, almost holding his breath with suspense.

Had there come no sound, doubtless, after lying there for five minutes, Frank must have become sleepy again, and laughing at his fears, turned over on his rude bed to drop off again.

But he did hear something. It sounded like a whisper, too, and positively came from over toward the doors. Frank looked closely, but so far as he could see, they were closed and barred, just as the boys had left them.

There it was again. Could it be Andy murmuring in his sleep? He was sometimes given to talking at such times; but Frank felt sure the sound did not come from the cot at all.

He slipped quietly off his bed. Fortunately

the night was warm, and not like the preceding one, when they had shivered in their pajamas. So he crept over toward the double doors.

As Frank bent his head close to the rough wood in order to listen he felt the door quiver. It went through him like a shock of electricity that some one was trying to see if the entrance to the hangar was kept locked, since there was nothing in sight outside to indicate the fact.

Could it be Puss Carberry and his shadow, coming back again to attempt further destruction? Frank had another suspicion flash through his brain that gave him more of a shock than this first thought. The two robbers who were said to be in hiding somewhere close by—might they not have conceived the idea of stealing the completed aeroplane of the Bird boys, and in this fashion making an escape, outwitting the officers of justice, who would never dream of a flight through the air?

He listened further. They seemed to be whispering together again, though he was quite unable to catch a single word of what was said. But he fully believed that if his last thought proved to be the truth these desperate men would not give up a cherished scheme

because of such a little obstacle as a barred door.

Then his first duty must be to arouse Andy, and without making any noise, if it could be accomplished. After that they would have to adapt their movements to circumstances.

So Frank cautiously made his way back to the cot where his cousin was peacefully slumbering, possibly dreaming of future triumphs that would fall to the portion of the Bird boys when they became masters of the air.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AEROPLANE THIEVES.

“Sh!”

Andy would have undoubtedly cried out on being so suddenly aroused by a shake, only that Frank hissed in his ear; and also held a hand over his mouth, so that he could not utter a sound.

He immediately put out a hand and touched Frank on the arm. It was intended to reassure the other, and convince him that the sleeper understood.

“What is it?” whispered Andy, as soon as the hand was removed from his mouth.

“Keep still! There are some persons outside. They tried the door, and I believe they’ll soon find the open window.”

Frank said this so close to Andy’s ear that any one five feet away could never have caught a sound.

“Oh!” gasped the other, as he began to get up. “Whatever will we do, Frank?”

“Sh! don’t speak again. Listen to me. We must try and hide behind something, or under the work bench. Come, there’s no time to lose, and be careful not to stumble.”

Frank drew his cousin on. Still, Andy had sense enough to stoop over and lift the big monkey wrench from the place where he had carefully deposited it before taking to his cot.

They crawled across the shed to the work bench, avoiding the extended wings of the aeroplane.

Just as they gained the shelter of the bench, and were pushing under it, there came a crackling noise from the further end of the rough building. Frank instantly knew what it meant. As the shed had only been intended as a cover from the elements, in the building no great pains had been taken, so that there were many cracks, each fully an inch in diameter.

Some one had taken pains to insert an iron rod, possibly, through one of those apertures, and was now engaged in prying off a board. Once that was accomplished it would be easy to gain an entrance.

Frank wondered what the intruders might think when they found evidences to the effect that some one had been sleeping there? And the bar across the wide double doors must also tell them the same fact. Would they look around to find the hidden lads, and injure them in some way; or might their desire for a

hurried departure cause them to ignore the facts?

Again came that crackling noise.

"What are they doing?" whispered Andy.

"Breaking in by ripping off a board," came the answer, accompanied by a warning pressure on the arm.

"Then I don't believe it's Puss and Sandy!" said the other, positively.

Frank did not attempt to convince him otherwise, for truth to tell his mind had been made up on that same score several minutes before. Those who were going to all this trouble to effect an entrance to the hangar, must have some more important reason urging them on than a mere desire to do mischief.

What had they better do? Frank could not decide on the spur of the moment. Afterwards he realized that their best course would have been to set up a great shouting, and make all the noise they could, which would have undoubtedly frightened off the marauders, who shunned publicity above all things.

And before Frank could collect his thoughts enough to decide upon any course, he knew that the board had yielded to the efforts of those who wielded the object that was being used as a crowbar.

Then he could hear some party crawling in

through the opening. Andy too understood. He was quivering at a tremendous rate, so that Frank actually feared lest he might set the bench to rattling, and betray their hiding-place. So he kept nudging him, in the hope of bolstering up his courage.

Whoever it was creeping along over the littered floor of the shed, he kept advancing. Presently they heard him mutter to himself. Then there came a scratching sound that told of a match being struck.

A faint light sprang up. The two lads, crouching there under the work bench, and clad only in their pajamas, saw the figure of a man kneeling not twelve feet away from them.

He happened to be in a position where the side of his face only could be seen; but Frank knew instantly that the intruder was an utter stranger to him.

Apparently the man had eyes only for the precious monoplane; for bending forward he stared at it eagerly, the while saying low words to himself that seemed to be expressions of exceeding rapture.

Evidently the sight of the air craft quite tickled him. Perhaps it reminded him of old times. Frank might have felt complimented that his work was appreciated so highly; but

the only sensation he really experienced was alarm lest the result of all their labor be stolen.

The match went out. About the same time there came a low call from beyond the doors. The man outside was getting impatient, and wanted his comrade to open up. Undoubtedly he had seen the light through the cracks, and knew his pal was safely inside. And he may also have had a glimpse of the aeroplane that was, of course, the main object of their regard.

Frank felt a new thrill. He had caught some of the low words, and while they were as so much Greek to him, he knew that the speaker must be a Frenchman! Like a flash he remembered what Larry had said about the aviator license which was found on the floor of the looted jewelry establishment being granted by a French society.

Then, this was Jules Garrone and his fellow desperado. All doubt was settled by that voice speaking in a foreign tongue.

Now the man inside was creeping over to where he knew the doors lay. Frank heard him fumbling with the bar. Surely he must guess from this that the shed was not untenanted. The boy's wandering hand had come in contact with a piece of wood, and

almost unconsciously he gripped it. If the worst came, they might put up some sort of fight, meanwhile trying to hold on to the precious aeroplane, and balk the wicked designs of these law breakers.

Then the doors opened, and were shoved far back. This alone must have told what the designs of the two intruders were. They needed room to wheel the monoplane out of the hangar; and the wide doors had been fashioned to admit of its passage when necessary.

More whispering followed. Then a second match was truck, and discovering a lantern hanging from a hook, it was eagerly seized upon by the smaller of the two.

They seemed to be deeply interested in the machine, and walked around, closely examining its construction, and exchanging eager sentences, as though becoming more and more pleased the further they looked.

Twice they were so close to the hidden lads that Frank could have stretched out a hand, and gripped one of their legs. It need hardly be said, however, that he did nothing of the kind. Larry had declared that according to the police chief the two jewelry robbers were desperate criminals; and if this were so it would be folly for two unarmed boys to think

of grappling with them in the hope of detaining them until help came.

The two intruders seemed to have arrived at a satisfactory conclusion with regard to the monoplane. Frank had heard them talking now in English, and could understand what was being said.

"It ees very good indeed," said the smaller man, with a laugh. "Zese boys, zey haf made one clever job. I believe it will go, and carry us both."

"Then the sooner we make a start the better I am pleased, Jules. At any minute right now we might be detected and stopped. Shall I get the things, and strap them on the machine?" asked the other, anxiously—he had been moving over and looking out of the doors several times, as though afraid of an interruption.

"*Oui!* It ees just as well," replied his companion. "Once we get up in ze air we can give zem all ze laugh. It haf please me exceedingly. I am much oblige to zese boys. I shall pleasure take in renewing my acquaintance with a Bleriot monoplane. It is like old times quite."

Jules, then, was the aviator who had won his spurs across the water. Why he had deserted such a profitable calling to become a

common thief doubtless had a story back of it.

Presently the second man came back after going outside. He carried some object with either hand. Frank held his very breath when he saw what these were. Nothing more nor less than a couple of suit-cases, just as the Chief had declared had been used in the jewelry robbery.

It afterwards developed that these were the property of the cashier, and one of the salesmen in the establishment. They were in the habit of carrying their laundry to town in this fashion; and at the time of the robbery the two bags had been in the store. As they were missing in the morning, it was plain that the thieves had appropriated them in order to accommodate their plunder. And this was how Chief Waller had known the fact.

Frank realized that he was within reaching distance of all the proceeds of the late robbery. How he would have liked jumping out and snatching those suit-cases away from the taller man. But Frank was too discreet a boy to think of attempting such a foolhardy thing. Besides, he must be concerned principally now in saving his beloved aeroplane from sharing the fate of the jewelry.

The bags were being fastened to the skeleton framework of the monoplane, so as not to

interfere with the working of the motor, or the steering apparatus.

“Make zem tight, Jean. It would be a catastrophe, should we escape, but drop our prizes,” said the smaller man; who was standing close to the propeller of the aeroplane, and giving it a few trial spins.

“It is fixed,” the other replied, as he came back to where his companion stood. “And now, shall we not push it out in the open.”

“Zat will not be hard,” replied Jules, bending his shoulders to the task.

The aeroplane had been nicely balanced on the three bicycle wheels, and upon being started immediately began to pass out of the hangar.

Frank could feel Andy quivering with indignation and resentment, and knew that the other was almost on the point of an explosion. Unless he were checked, he was apt to rush out, and try, single-handed, to hold the robbers back.

CHAPTER XII.

HELD BACK.

"Hush! Don't make a sound yet!" was what Frank whispered.

"But look at them, Frank! The skunks are stealing our neat little trick! They mean to fly away in her!" answered Andy. And perhaps his husky voice might have been heard only that just then Jules happened to have started the engine, and the noise of its throbbing pulsations drowned all other sounds.

Evidently the skilled aviator was bent on making sure that everything was correct before starting aloft. It was dangerous business under even the best of conditions; and certainly when they were about to risk their lives in a craft made by a couple of green-horn lads.

Still, Jules was voicing his surprise and gratification. He had certainly never expected to find a machine so nearly perfect as the result of inexperienced lads.

"Marvelous! superb! excellent!" he was saying with his French extravagance of speech. "I take off my cap to zese boys. Zey

are surely bound to make zare mark in ze profession. Jean, it ees no longer a chance we take. It ees a certainty. We sall laugh at ze gendarmes as we soar over zere heads in ze sky. Pouf! a turn of ze hand, and ze propeller it will buzz. Zen we are off wiz a rush. Get aboard, Jean!"

The taller man did not seem to have quite so much confidence as Jules. Doubtless he feared that they would be accepting unusual risks in thus trusting their lives and fortunes to a contraption made by mere boys. Still, the situation was such that he had to yield to the opinion of his comrade. And if all went well, it was an ideal method of giving their enemies the slip.

So, after giving a last look around him, with somewhat of a sigh he started to attach himself in the position which Jules had pointed out.

The new monoplane had been built especially for two. Frank and his cousin had that in mind when starting in to construct the machine; since neither of them wished to cruise through the air alone.

Hence, there was a place for the second man, where he would just balance matters nicely. And Jules had himself marked out where the two heavy suit-cases should be tied

fast. In this, his former experience stood him well, since he was aware of all the little tricks developed by gliding aeroplanes when at work.

“You stay inside here, and when you hear me shout just whoop it up at the top of your voice. I’m going out to see if I can play a trick on them, and prevent an ascent,” whispered Frank.

Immediately he was gone, and Andy, feeling mighty shaky, as he afterwards frankly confessed, succeeded in crawling out from under the work bench. Still clutching his wrench weapon he tiptoed over to the vicinity of the open doors, where he stood almost holding his breath in his desire to have a full supply in his lungs when the signal came to let loose.

Frank had meanwhile crept softly outside. The shadow cast by the hangar served to hide him more or less. And besides, both men seemed to be completely taken up with what they were doing, for they certainly failed to look his way.

It was apparent that Frank had conceived some sort of idea. These things often came to him like a flash of light. It was fortunate in the present instance, for time was of considerable value. At any moment now, Jules,

finding that his companion had settled himself, was apt to switch the power on to the shaft, and start the propeller to whirling around.

When that occurred it would be too late for any one to think of stopping the monoplane, which must begin to move off on its wheeled base, increasing in momentum with each yard of progress, until finally it would take gradually to the air, if all went well, in a graceful upward curve.

Frank had picked up the padlock belonging to the doors, and which was hanging, open, on a convenient nail. He knew that just outside there was a long and stout chain, which had been used somehow with the lumber brought from the yard, and forgotten when the wagon pulled out.

It was in connection with that same chain that his thoughts ran just now. And he had faith to believe that, if given just half a minute of time, he could fix it so that the bold thieves would find some difficulty in breaking away from old Mother Earth when Jules chose to set that propeller whizzing.

Again was Frank indebted to the noise of the churning engine, for it effectually deadened what clanking sounds the chain made

when he took hold of its ends, and crept forward.

He kept as low down as he could. Even the moon seemed to be in full sympathy with the boy's mission. She had very conveniently hidden her smiling disc behind quite a dark cloud just then, and brought a shadow across the face of the land. Perhaps Jules had noticed this fact. Perhaps he was waiting until it grew light again, so he could see what lay ahead of them. This ascending from an unknown field must have all sorts of dangers attached to it, which an experienced aviator understood.

And so Frank was allowed to reach the rear of the aeroplane without being detected. His perfect knowledge concerning the build of the machine served him well at this crisis, for he knew just where to go in order to find what he sought.

Fortune favored him to a most remarkable degree. Why, if he had the ordering of the whole affair he could hardly have improved upon the arrangements. They had pushed the aeroplane out possibly a score of feet beyond the doors of the hangar. And in so doing the wheels just avoided a weighty object which Frank had had dumped there,

intending to use the same as an anchor, to which the monoplane could be fastened when they came to trying her propeller at full speed.

This was a large iron post, that must have weighed all of three hundred pounds. It had a large ring attached. Once upon a time it stood in front of the Whympers domicile, and horses were tied to the ring; but lately it had come to be a nuisance, so that the colonel had ordered it uprooted, and taken to the dump in the rear, from which the young aviators had rescued it.

And through that same ring Frank now slipped his chain. His purpose was plain. Instead of keeping restive horses from taking to their heels, the old post was now intended to act as a restraining power to a steed of the upper air currents, and curb the ambition of the monoplane when the propeller started to turning.

When Frank had managed to pass his chain through the frame of the rudder he brought the two ends together, and snapped the padlock shut. Its jaws held the ends of the chain fast, forming an effectual brake.

Satisfied that he had managed to anchor the aeroplane to the ground, the boy next

crept back toward the shed. He knew that the explosion must come in a brief time now, and wished to be as far away from the two robbers at that critical moment as possible.

Andy saw some one creeping toward him. The moon was still behind the cloud, although just about to appear again, having given Frank all the time he needed. At first Andy thought it must be one of the robbers coming back to finish him, or else get something that had been forgotten. And he had even mechanically half raised the big monkey wrench before he caught a low sign that told him the truth.

What Frank had done he could not even guess; but he had faith in the other, no matter what the circumstances might be, and believed now that in some way his chum must have managed to block the game of grab.

“Did you fix it?” he whispered, as the other joined him.

“Watch and see what happens,” came the low reply. “And when I let go, shout like a house afire. If there’s a policeman inside of half a mile he’ll come here on the tear.”

The face of the moon began to appear beyond the dark curtain. That was to be the signal for the start. Jules was bending over even now.

"Hold tight, Jean! It ees to go!" they heard him say, in a thrilling tone.

"I am ready. Let loose!" answered the other, recklessly, as he clung to the upright, close to which he had taken his position.

Andy held his breath. Both boys were staring hard at their beloved monoplane, seen there in the moonlight. How brave she looked; and to think that two rascally law-breakers were occupying the seats they had fondly hoped should be their portion when the maiden flight was taken.

The engine still worked steadily, with a series of little explosions that denoted an expenditure of only a part of its capacity. Suddenly the propeller commenced to turn swiftly around. Jules had made the shift!

The monoplane began to move forward on its padded bicycle wheels; and Andy could not repress a cry of chagrin, as he saw his darling machine start off.

But his outburst was as nothing compared to the startled exclamations and angry shouts that arose from the two occupants of the monoplane, when, after going a dozen feet, it suddenly brought up with a round turn that almost sent them backwards from their seats.

And with propeller whizzing aimlessly, and

engine working steadily, the trapped aeroplane refused to budge another foot, being held fast by the lumber chain, and the ground anchor that had once been a massive hitching post!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BIRD BOYS IN LUCK.

It was certainly an exciting moment all around.

Even the usually cool Frank felt a thrill pass over him, as he contemplated the frantic efforts of the aeroplane to leave its anchorage, and take a maiden spin through the balmy atmosphere of that July night.

Both the Frenchmen were spluttering with dismay and rage. One of them believed that something must have happened to the machinery of the monoplane, and his outcries were hurled against the "fool boys" who had believed they could produce a flier capable of making good.

But Jules, who had had much experience with such things, knew differently. He easily recognized in those tugs and jerks a willingness on the part of the little air craft to mount upward, if given a fair chance.

So Jules, having shut off the futile power, was now climbing down from his seat bent upon investigation. Of course he must speedily discover the smart trick that had been played upon them, whereby the "sky-

lofter" had been pinned down to earth by a mere lumber chain, and a castoff hitching post.

What then? Would he endeavor to break loose from the anchor; or on the other hand might they expect that he would dash toward the shed where two boys were giving tongue by now at the top of their strong voices, calling for help?

Andy still gripped that big monkey wrench. In a pinch he believed it would not prove a bad thing to cling to, and might make an effective weapon of defense. And Frank had groped around until he once more found the billet of wood which he had laid down upon issuing forth upon his recent errand.

They saw Jules finally land upon the ground. Thanks to the moon for being so accommodating, there was now an abundance of light, and they could see everything.

So could Jules. He immediately discovered just why the sturdy little engine of the aeroplane, which had excited his ardent admiration a short time before, proved unable to break away from the near vicinity of the hangar.

He was evidently so excited, and "frustrated," as Andy afterwards termed it, that he came near having a fit. The boys indeed,

thought he was choking, from the many strange sounds that broke forth from his throat; but this was only Jules' way of trying to jumble every expletive he could think of into one solid mass.

No need to tell him to whom they owed this failure of their brilliant scheme for slipping away from those who were searching far and wide to find them. The series of outcries from the open doors of the hangar gave the secret away.

The second robber had by this time managed to release himself from his seat; for being in fear lest he should topple out of the reeling aeroplane Jean had apparently fastened himself in by means of a handy rope.

He, too, showed signs of tremendous excitement, nor could he be blamed, since by this time there were symptoms to indicate that the entire community had been aroused by the whoops of the two boys. Lights flashed in various windows of the nearest houses, and the hoarse voices of men could be heard calling to each other.

Apparently, unless Jules and his companion made haste to vanish, they were apt to be surrounded, and their escape cut off.

A light that had been moving speedily along the road suddenly made a swerve, and

turned into the field at the gate. It had the brilliancy of electricity, and was undoubtedly the acetylene searchlight on a motorcycle.

“The police are coming!” shouted Frank several times, at the top of his voice. Of course this was only a mere guess on his part, but he thought it would do no harm to add to the alarm of the two rogues, and confuse them more than ever. There was no longer a possibility that they would attack the boys, for the time would not allow of such a thing. Nor could they by any means manage to detach the coveted monoplane from its secure anchorage. Hence, the only thing left was for them to run while the chance remained.

The man on the motorcycle was coming straight toward the shed. Though possibly his machine wobbled more or less on the far from smooth field, he knew how to keep his seat. More than that, he even managed to discharge a pistol in the air, for the purpose of assuring those who called for help that assistance was near at hand.

That finished the panicky condition of Jules and his confederate. They knew now that it was indeed an officer of the law who had happened, so fortunately for the owners of the aeroplane, to be passing when the alarm was given. Doubtless, in their excited

imagination, they could picture a dozen similar guardians of the peace surrounding the field; and they may even have believed that they had walked into a trap, of which the wonderful little airship was the bait.

Everything was forgotten but the fact of their peril. Jules shouted in a voice as shrill as a siren that his comrade was to take to his heels, and run for all he was worth. And so they made off, running like a pair of foxes with a pack of hounds in full cry.

As if by some prearranged system they separated in making their flight. Doubtless this was done to confuse pursuit; and they could meet again, if lucky enough to get clean away, at some appointed rendezvous.

Frank stopped shouting. There was quite enough racket already, he thought, and the one aim of their combined chorus had been attained, since the thieves were in full flight. Besides, he was rather short of breath.

"Shucks! they've got away!" declared Andy, visibly chagrined; as if he had begun to cherish a hope that the pair of precious rascals might be captured through a combination of all forces, some of the glory falling to the Bird boys.

"Yes, but the police will be hot on the track after this exposure," said Frank. "You see,

they will know now just where to take up the trail. If they had a pair of good dogs they could easily run those fellows down now."

"What's all this racket mean?" asked the man on the motorcycle, as he jumped out of his saddle, and leaned forward to stare at the two boys, who must have presented rather a strange picture just then, seeing that they were clad only in their striped pajamas, and barefooted.

"It was those two robbers who cleaned out Leffingwell's place!" replied Andy, with his usual impetuosity. "They wanted to steal our new aeroplane in order to escape. One of them is Jules, the French aviator, who knows all about airships, and can tell a good one when he sees it."

By this time other men were beginning to come panting to the spot. They were neighbors of Colonel Josiah's, hastily clad, and bearing all manner of arms, from an old double-barrel shotgun to an up-to-date Marlin repeating rifle. A stableman even carried a two-pronged hay fork, with which he was making wicked lunges in the air, as in imagination he speared desperate foes.

"Don't you know us, Joe Green?" asked Frank, recognizing the officer.

"Why, bless my soul," said the man, "if it

ain't Frank Bird, and Andy, too! Is this your aeroplane, boys? And you say those slippery rascals were trying to get away with it, meanin' to slip out of the county by the air route? No use chasing after 'em now, because they've disappeared from sight. But I'll get in touch with the Chief over the phone, and have him come out here with more men."

Even Colonel Josiah put in an appearance, clad in a wonderful Japanese dressing gown of gorgeous colors, and waving in one hand a tremendous sixshooter that no doubt had a history of its own.

"What happened?" he cried, as he limped, crutch and all, into the little circle surrounding the two boys. "Let me get a chance at the rogues, and I'll settle their hash! Who are they, and what have they been trying to do, Andy, my lad?"

Half a dozen voices tried to explain at once.

"Stop!" shouted the old man, waving his crutch like the baton of a band master. "Let Andy speak. He was on the spot, and ought to know. We don't want hearsay evidence in this court. Now, lad, what's all the blooming row?"

So Andy had to once more tell how they had been aroused by the sounds of some one

trying to get into the shed; how they crouched under the workbench while the two bold robbers examined the monoplane, and determined to sail away in it, so as to leave no trail behind that could be followed—and finally how Frank had conceived his brilliant scheme for balking this evil intention.

Every eye was of course turned upon the chain and anchor, and men began to even chuckle when the full force of Frank's design was understood.

"A clever dodge, my lad," said Colonel Josiah, after he had bent down and examined the novel method of holding a runaway monoplane. "I never knew a smarter trick to be turned on the spur of the moment. It does you credit, hanged if it doesn't. And are you sure they did no harm to your machine?"

"I am confident that they had no time to think of that, sir," replied Frank, who was now beginning to think of getting more clothes on him, if this audience were to be prolonged.

"That's lucky, yes, deuced lucky," declared the anxious colonel, who seemed to be about as much concerned over the safety of the monoplane as the builders themselves. "But what is this you've got here, boys? All ready to

make a journey, were you, and take your grips along?"

Frank and Andy sprang forward. Apparently up to now they had quite forgotten a very important fact, until it was thus forcibly brought to their attention by the words of the veteran traveler.

One look they gave into the body of the aircraft. Then they reached out their right hands, as if governed by some mutual inspiration.

"Shake!" said Frank, with a laugh; "sure we're in great luck after all, cousin!"

So they were; for in their great haste to depart to safer regions the two robbers had quite forgotten to carry off the suit-cases containing their plunder!

CHAPTER XIV.

A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK.

Ain't this the greatest thing ever?" cried Andy, as with trembling fingers he started to unfasten the cords by which the suit cases had been secured, so they might not drop out, should the sailing aircraft wobble in space.

"It certainly does takes the cake for dumb luck!" observed Frank, hardly less excited himself and forgetting all about his lack of clothes.

"Suppose you explain then?" suggested a neighbor. "We'd like to join in congratulations if we only knew what it was all about."

"Why, you see," began Andy, "these ain't our bags at all."

"They belong to the two gentlemen who thought to borrow our machine for a little moonlight spin across lots to the next county," Frank went on, his face covered with a wide grin, as he hefted one of the suit cases, and found it mighty solid.

"What!" exclaimed Joe Green, the officer, as though suddenly waking up.

"Feel the weight of that bag, Joe!" remarked Frank. "Strike you it's quite hefty for

a lot of soiled linen? Well, it's strapped nice and secure, and we'll let it stay so till Chief Waller comes to take charge, but I rather guess these two bags hold all the stuff that was grabbed out of Leffingwell's jewelry store!"

His word produced another spasm of excitement. Men crowded around to gaze at the suit cases and exchange remarks.

"It's so, I reckon," remarked one; "'cause here's the letters A. N. S. on the end of this bag, and they stand for Arthur Nelson Sage, the cashier of Leffingwell's store. Did you ever hear of such luck? Sure these boys are in clover!"

"I should remark they were," observed another, enviously. "With a reward of five hundred falling to 'em for the recovery of the stuff. Some people just tumble head over heels into luck. I never struck such a juicy thing in all my life."

"Well, they deserve it, all right," declared Colonel Josiah, defiantly. "What d'ye think of boys who could build such a trump outfit as that ere? And then stick by it through thick and thin? And wasn't that a cute dodge, holdin' the aeroplane back with a hog chain and my old hitching post? Why, Si Clapp, you'd never have thought up such a game as that in a thousand years, let alone in ten sec-

onds. So I say again they deserve it. What they get they've won fair. Ain't it so, neighbors?"

A rousing cheer answered him. And leaving the two bags in charge of Colonel Josiah, the Bird boys scurried inside to pick up a few more clothes and get shoes on their feet, since it was apparent that they were in for a couple of hours' siege.

Andy's teeth fairly rattled with excitement. Had he been in a freezing atmosphere he could not have shivered at a greater rate.

"Say, Frank, looks like this being broke up in our sleep was going to be a regular thing," he remarked, while dressing.

"That's right," replied his cousin, laughing. "One night it's a sandbag from a passing balloon that lands with a smash on our pile of boards. Then we are awakened by a couple of prowlers, who want to steal our dandy little airship. Wonder what it will be the next time?"

"Yes," said Andy, quickly; "but you forget that two nights ago we had visitors here, even if we didn't know it at the time. That makes three in succession. The first may have been along the order of an accident. The second was what Professor Gregg would call a coin-

cidence. But I declare the third time makes it a *habit*!"

"Well, Andy, we'll get used to it in time, perhaps. Though if this thing keeps going we'll have to take a nap in the daytime to make up for lost sleep. Did Joe go with Mr. McGovern to 'phone headquarters?"

"Yes, that was what he said he meant to do," replied the other, as he finished lacing his second shoe. "And so I reckon we'll have a squad of the police out here as soon as they can get the patrol wagon moving to take charge of those bags and ask all sorts of fool questions. Do you think they'll find Jules and his pal?"

"Not unless they show more smartness than they have up to now," replied Frank. "Of course, the two men will be as mad as hops to think they allowed the bags to stay. But since the whole county is aroused by now and every day makes it harder for them to get away, they'll be thinking only of escape. And you know there are plenty of fine hiding places in the woods bordering the lake, where they can stay for a week if they only find some way to get grub."

By this time the boys were dressed. Upon going out again they found that the group had been increased by the arrival of several more

belated neighbors, who, having heard of the row, could not resist the temptation to get out and investigate.

All sorts of questions were asked and the boys replied good naturedly. Indeed, they had reason for feeling genial just then. Fortune had been very kind to them, since not only had they been able to save their valuable aeroplane without its suffering the slightest damage, but here the alarmed rascals had actually presented them with their bags of plunder.

Presently a wagon was heard coming furiously along the road. Of course this was the police, headed by the chief himself, clad in a resplendent uniform, with a glittering silver star on his broad and manly chest to designate his official importance

"Oh, say! Do we have to go over all this stuff again?" groaned Andy.

"Well, you see, they have to know how we came by this loot," laughed Frank. "Otherwise we might get pulled in for receiving stolen property. So make up your mind to stick to the statements you've already given. After they've taken the plunder away perhaps we can shoo these good people off, trip our machine back in the shed and once more try to get a little nap before another day comes."

So when the chief came up, asking ques-

tions and examining the suit cases, both of the boys were ready to tell all they knew.

Chief Waller was a big man, in point of size; and, according to his own mind, a brainy one in addition. He had a self-important air about him, but that never deceived Frank an iota. The boy knew that just now the chief envied them their good fortune and was only too willing to share, even in a small degree, the glory that must come in connection with the recovery of the stolen property.

"You boys are justly entitled to the reward," he said, pompously, after a time. "And I'll see that you get it. I can appreciate the clever nature of the game you played, Frank, for that is exactly what I would have done under similar circumstances."

Neither of the boys allowed even a smile to flicker across their faces, though it was almost ludicrous, the idea of Chief Waller *ever* having a brilliant idea. He had been at the head of the force three years or more, and while he did his duty decently and impressed tramps with a fitting sense of the majesty of the law, no one had ever known him to make a clever play.

The boys were only too glad to see the patrol wagon depart, bearing the two recov-

ered suit cases, filled with plunder, and the several officers.

"We'll get to work in the morning," the chief had promised ere departing; "and run the rascals to earth. They're in the last ditch now, and the hour is not far away when they'll be in the clutches of the law!"

But Frank and Andy had their own opinion about that. They chanced to believe that if the matter depended solely upon the smartness of the police head, Jules and his confederate would prove too cunning to fall into any trap.

"Come, let's push the aeroplane back into its quarters," said Frank.

"That's the ticket," remarked Andy, promptly. "Just unlock that chain and give us a chance. Hi, careful there, Phil! Don't knock up against that plane again that way. They don't like rough handling, even if they are keyed up with stanch wire cables. Now, push easy like. Away she goes back. Take care of that left plane against the door jamb! Here we are, and thank you all. And now to get a little snooze before day comes. Why, Frank, it's two o'clock!"

Taking the hint, those who had remained to give a hand and stare a little longer at the strange machine, the likes of which few had

ever before set eyes on, betook themselves off, returning to their several homes.

So the two Bird boys, finding the coast clear, closed the doors of the hangar once more and secured them with the bar.

Frank had managed to replace the board that had been taken off the end of the shed at the time Jules made his entrance.

"Say, you don't think now for a minute those chaps will come sneaking around here again tonight, in hopes of getting this little daisy of a cruiser, do you?" Andy asked, as they prepared to retire once more.

"Well," replied his cousin, "I don't believe they've got the nerve. They know the police have been here and will expect that some of the men in blue are hanging around still, in hopes of picking them up. Oh, no! This is the last spot about Bloomsbury they want to visit. Make your mind easy on that score, Andy."

"How d'ye suppose they picked out our machine, Frank, rather than the other? The biplane has been up in the air and tried out, you know."

"They may never have known there was another. By some accident they discovered our hangar here. The thing that puzzles me most is how they came to believe the shed was de-

sented, when they saw a light here and you coming. But perhaps the one who watched supposed you would return to the house later. And being in a hurry to get back to his pal and tell the good news, he didn't investigate further. Anyhow," Frank went on, as he yawned and stretched, "I'm just too sleepy right now to bother my head any more about the whole business. Ready? Then out goes the lantern. Me to hit the pillow hard and get rested up."

And after that silence reigned profound in the shed that covered the aeroplane.

CHAPTER XV.

"IT IS FINE!"

"Wake up, Andy! It's long past sun-up!"

"How's the weather out there?" asked a sleepy voice from under the blanket that covered the cot.

"Fair enough, but from the little fleecy white clouds I see I'm afraid we're going to have a lot more breeze than yesterday," replied Frank, who was washing his face in the tin basin outside.

"Shucks! that would be too mean for anything, just when we've got everything tuned up for our great trial spin," and the grumbler rolled out of his bed, after which he disentangled himself from the blankets and made for the door, to take an observation on his own account.

"It's quiet enough just now to go up," he announced, eagerly.

"All right, suppose you make the try. Reckon you'd wish you had some more clothes on before you got very high. This traveling through the air is hardly suited to pajamas as a regular thing," jeered Frank.

"Oh, well!" Andy went on, his natural good nature coming to the rescue; "there'll be

plenty of chances for our first voyage over the fields. And meanwhile I'll have an opportunity to look in several places I've thought of."

"For that wrench, I suppose you mean?" said Frank. "Well, I hope you find it soon or there'll be no living with you. I never saw such a fellow to harp on one tune. You must have been dreaming about it."

"I have," replied the other, promptly and unblushingly. "That's what gave me an idea. It wouldn't be the first lost thing that was found through the medium of a dream, either. I was reading only the other day——"

But just then he had to duck, when Andy tossed the contents of the basin in his direction, so it was never really known what strange thing he had read.

After they had partaken of breakfast the two boys pottered around. Frank's prediction had proven only too true. With the advancing sun had come a breeze that, while at no time bordering on the character of a hurricane, still dampened the ardor of the young aeronauts.

An experienced aviator might have found little trouble in guiding his machine while such a wind was in evidence, but it would be next to foolhardy in novices taking such chances.

Bold though he could be on occasion, as he had proven when he fastened that chain to

the monoplane in which the two scoundrels were seated, ready to fly away, at the same time Frank could show wonderful discretion.

It was just as well that this were so, for it balanced the team. Andy was an impetuous fellow and apt to rush things without ceremony.

"Don't you think we might take the chances?" he had said several times during the morning, as he looked up anxiously into the heavens like a bird that longed to be soaring aloft.

"Not at all," answered the other, decisively. "I've got a hunch that along about noon there'll come something of a change, and this wind die down. Then will be our chance. Think how silly we'd feel if we made the try now, broke some of the parts of the aeroplane, even if we didn't our precious necks in the bargain, and then when helpless, saw a dead calm settle down."

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped. But it's tough waiting. Oh, yes! There was that drawer in the work bench; I dreamed I found my wrench in there," and he hurried back into the shed, filled with new zeal.

As he once more reappeared five minutes later, scratching his head, and with a look of gloom on his usually merry face, Frank de-

cided that the great puzzle had not yet been solved. Dreams, then, were not always to be relied upon when searching for things that had gone astray.

It was about eleven o'clock and the breeze certainly did show some signs of going down, when Frank heard his cousin give utterance to an exclamation.

"There! you see some people don't seem to be afraid to take chances!" Andy was saying, with a touch of discontent in his voice.

Looking up, Frank saw the biplane rising above the trees again. Both boys were plainly noticeable and it was Puss who was piloting the aircraft.

The biplane made several furious dashes this way and that, as slants of wind caught her extended planes. Puss lacked the experience of a skilled aviator and apparently hardly knew how to avoid the full force of those gusts. Again and again Frank caught his breath, fully believing that the biplane was doomed to make an ignominious plunge back to the earth, for the gyrations through which it went seemed to point that way.

"Good for Puss!" he said, after one of these wild exhibitions, from which the airship managed to recover and move along fairly decently. "He's learning, all right. But I tell you,

Andy, they're taking big chances. I'd rather go a little slow in the start until I'd learned the ropes. Oh, look at that dip, would you? That was a near call. I hope nothing happens to them. I'd hate, for lots of reasons, to see them spilled out or the biplane wrecked so soon."

"Well, so would I," declared Andy. "And after all I guess you're right about taking unnecessary chances. I don't think I'd like to be in that craft right now."

But the wind kept falling and as Puss Carberry learned better how to meet each puff of air he manipulated his machine with more success.

"Look, Frank, he's heading this way! I honestly believe they're going to fly over our heads! It would be just like Puss and his impudence. I feel like going inside and cheating him out of his laugh."

But nevertheless Andy did nothing of the kind. His curiosity had been too highly excited, and he was also bent on watching all the crooks and turns made by the advancing biplane, with a view to profiting by the experience of others.

There could be no longer any doubt concerning the design of the two young aviators. The machine was heading straight for the field

where Andy had had his hangar built. And presently the biplane was directly over their heads. They could hear the engine humming merrily, while the popping of the unused muffler sounded like the miniature explosion of musketry on a battlefield.

"Hello! caught you napping this time, didn't we?" called Puss Carberry, as he looked down from his perch, fully eighty feet above their heads.

"Come on up; the sailing's fine!" mocked Sandy, waving his hand derisively at the two rivals standing there with uptilted heads.

Frank was not possessed of a small nature. He waved back and shouted:

"Fine work, Puss! You're doing nobly so far; keep it up! We're going to make a try when the wind goes down. Your biplane looks immense and seems to work in great shape Bully!"

But Andy said never a word. Truth to tell, he was eating his heart out with envy as he stood there and gaped. For it had been the ambition of his soul that their airship should be the very first ever built in Bloomsbury to navigate the region of the upper currents. And here were the precious pair whom he detested, actually making himself and Frank look like back numbers.

So, having no words to express his disgust, he dodged into the shed again, and Frank heard him throwing things around at a great rate, as he once more tried to get some trace of the mysterious missing tool.

Noon came at last.

The biplane had descended some little time before and apparently with success, from what Frank, who was watching eagerly, could judge.

"Puss is getting a good grip," he said. "I can see a big difference already in the way he manages. And that is what every air pilot must have—experience with all kinds of conditions."

"Even when the wind blows!" suggested Andy, a bit maliciously.

"Sure, after he learns his business some," replied Frank. "And now let's get lunch over with as soon as possible. Then we will be in condition to make our ascent when the conditions are right. You go in first, Andy. My people will think I've taken up boarding with you over here, I reckon; it's so long since I've eaten a meal at home. But you've got a boss cook, all right."

At one o'clock both of them had finished the midday meal. Colonel Josiah, having learned that there was a good chance of a flight that afternoon, had hobbled out to the "avia-

tion field," as he was pleased to call his property now.

"Wouldn't miss it for a big lot, lads," he remarked, as they got him a box to sit down on where he could see everything that took place.

"There's that biplane bobbing up again away over yonder, colonel," remarked Frank, about half an hour later.

Of course, the old veteran was intensely interested in the movements of the rival machine. He could not help admire it, even though loyal to the workmanship of his two boys.

"Huh! he's doing pretty well, I admit," he said, grumblingly. "But wait till you get going and then he'll just have to take a back seat. I believe a monoplane is more like a real bird than any of the other types. Ain't it nigh time, Frank, for you to get a move on? I don't reckon I can stand this much longer."

Frank smiled. With two against one it began to look as though he must speedily capitulate. There was Andy keeping a pair of hungry eyes glued upon him and with a look of mute entreaty in his blue eyes.

Frank raised his hand to feel the air, gave one more look all around, drew in a long breath and then turning to his comrade he nodded his head.

"Do we start?" demanded the other, eagerly.

"It is time!" was Frank's simple reply, as he stepped over to where the little monoplane awaited the coming of its makers.

CHAPTER XVI.

SEVEN TIMES AROUND THE CIRCLE.

Frank knew full well that he was about to start upon the most risky thing that he had ever undertaken thus far in his whole life.

Many a skilled aviator would hesitate to take up a second person with him in a monoplane. True, in building the machine they had figured on this matter. And there was now a dead calm, which made matters easier for the novice. Then again, Frank was perfectly cool and not apt to lose his head under the most trying conditions.

He had studied these things closely. He had visited the aviation field more than once. And while thus far he had kept the matter a dead secret, even from his chum, Frank had himself been up in an aeroplane for a little swing around the field at the time of his visit to Long Island. So that if it was true that Puss Carberry had passed through this experience he was but following in the wake of his rival.

Frank knew what must be done. He saw that Andy was fixed in his seat and gave him last words of advice. Everything was now ready for the start. And Frank was secretly

glad that the biplane had dropped out of sight again, because he did not wish to have his attention distracted from the work in managing his eccentric steed of the air.

The colonel had insisted upon having a hand in the start, nor would he be denied, so Frank had instructed him just what to do in giving the propeller an initial swing. Several boys were hurrying into the field, possibly Elephant and Larry, anxious to be present at the launching of the new craft intended to soar among the clouds.

"Ready!" cried Frank, presently, as he took a firm grip on the steering wheel and prepared to start the engine.

"Ready!" answered the old man from the rear.

"Then go!"

The engine began humming musically and as the propeller whipped around, the monoplane started to glide away on the three bicycle wheels designed for this purpose.

Imagine the thrill that was passing over those two lads, seated there, as their pace increased quickly until they were really speeding along. But that was nothing compared to the delicious excitement that came upon them when Frank altered the position of the rudder so that the rapidly moving machine

began to actually leave the ground and ascend in a graceful upward curve.

"Oh!" gasped Andy, whose face was white, but more through sheer excitement than anything in the shape of fear.

If they should live to the century mark neither of those lads would ever forget the strange sensation that nearly overwhelmed them upon feeling themselves moving through the air for the first time, with no solid earth to depend upon—only that rapidly throbbing engine and the broad pinions that extended out on either side to keep them from being dashed to the ground.

As in a dream they heard the shouts from Colonel Josiah and the boys. The one grand thing that impressed them was the fact that their initial start had been a splendid success, and that they were now launched on the sea of adventure in the wide domain of the upper air as full-fledged aviators!

"Ain't it just grand?" exclaimed Andy, when they had ascended to possibly a height of fifty feet or more and Frank had brought the airship on an even keel, so that they began to circle around the field on a level with some of the tree tops.

"The finest ever," replied the pilot of the craft, shortly, for he did not mean to have his

attention diverted from his business thus early in the game.

Later on, when sailing the monoplane became second nature to them, doubtless they could take their eyes off the front of the machine and look around.

Frank remembered his experience in learning to ride a bicycle, and he believed he was even now passing through just such a similar episode. It seemed as though the slightest movement on the part of either Andy or himself caused the delicate airship to wobble frightfully, so that his heart stood still with dread. But by degrees he found that it instantly righted. And the faster they moved through space the less chance there seemed to be of these eccentric antics.

They had already made two complete circuits of the field. Frank now managed to actually tear his eyes away from his wheel and the fore part of the aeroplane long enough to shoot a glance downward.

How strange things looked, although they were but such a short distance up! And how queer the earth must appear to a flier who sails thousands of feet aloft, with the rivers and hills marked below him as on a map!

“There comes the biplane again!” remarked Andy, in some excitement.

Frank took the alarm at once.

"Keep quiet!" he urged. "Don't twist your neck around so, Andy! And even if they do come, we want nothing to do with them today. This is no time for racing or any monkey-shines."

"Or monkey wrenches, either," complained the other, instantly. "But they're headed this way, all right, Frank. They mean to watch and see what we do."

"Let 'em," replied Frank, promptly, as he continued to keep the monoplane curving in that one big circle. "The air is free to all, and so long as they let us alone you bet I'm not aching to bother with them. Now keep quiet, can't you?"

"But what if they bump us, eh?" urged Andy, uneasily.

"Rats! Not much danger of that, because both machines would go down in a mess. And Puss is too much like a cat to take such big chances. Never mind them, I tell you. Just watch how we are doing and pick up points. Ha! there's Colonel Josiah waving his crutch and shouting. He'll be as hoarse as a crow soon."

"They're mounting up higher and higher, Frank. I bet they want to show off and look down on us," grumbled Andy.

"Let 'em, then. They won't have the chance much longer, once I get the hang of this thing," commented the other.

"How does it work, Frank? And does she mind her helm all right?"

"Like magic," came the pleased reply. "Why, the slightest touch changes the course up or down or sideways. You see, that's the advantage of air travel. A ship can only go on a level, no matter how you point her nose, but an aeroplane has the choice of ascending or descending."

"Yes, sometimes descending too fast," said Andy.

"Perhaps; but we won't talk of that. Are they still coming this way, Andy?"

"Huh! they're almost over our heads right now," declared the other, stretching his neck. "Don't you hear their motor fussing to beat the band? It would be just like one of those sneaks to try and drop something down on us and claim it was an accident."

"Oh, punk! Let up on that. That would spoil their chance for a race; and don't you see Puss is just dying to beat us in that silver cup run?" said Frank.

"Hey! Hello, down there!" came a hail from almost directly above.

"Hello yourself!" answered Frank, without looking up.

"Managed to get a move on, did you?" pursued Puss, as he held in his biplane so that he could sail along not fifty feet away from the other aircraft.

No doubt he was eagerly sizing the monoplane up the while and making a mental calculation as to what chances there would be of her giving him a stiff race.

"Why don't you get up where you can see something?" called out Sandy, when neither of the others had replied to the remark of his companion.

"Oh, this is good enough for us the first time. When we get used to the feeling you'll see us climb!" said Frank, pleasantly.

"Huh! guess you're afraid, that's what," jeered Sandy.

"Perhaps you're right Sandy," replied Frank. "This is a queer business for a greenhorn, and I'm not anxious to break my neck in the start. Give us a little time and we'll show you what this machine can do."

"Well, by-by then," called Puss. "We can't bother with such a slow coach. But if you don't get along better than that the race is sure going to be a walkover."

"You just wait and see. The fellow laughs

loudest who laughs last!" shouted Andy, who could hold in no longer.

Floating back on the slight breeze that had started to blow again came the disdainful laugh of the two reckless young aviators. Puss had opened his throttle and the biplane was now sweeping onward like the wind.

"My, they're going some!" declared Andy, a bit awed by the venturesome act of the rival crew. "Do you think we could hit up a pace like that, Frank?"

"Don't doubt it in the least," replied the other. "But nothing doing today, my boy. I'm satisfied to move around here in a steady fashion. We're learning all the while. I want to know this little machine's ways like a book. I want to feel that I'm just a part of the outfit and understand her whims and capers. After that I'll be ready to do stunts in the way of speed and lofting, not before."

And in his heart Andy knew that his chum was right. An aeroplane is the last means of transportation in the world to trifle with, because of the peril that is ever hanging over the head or lying in wait from a fall.

Seven times had they circled the field now. The engine had thus far worked with clock-like fidelity, never missing a stroke. Frank was really charmed with its performance, for

he had anticipated that until the newness wore off and the parts got smoothed from use he might have more or less engine trouble.

He was even thinking that it might be well enough to call the flight off and see how successful a landing they could make, when, without the slightest warning, the engine ceased working.

Something had occurred to stop the machine, whether his fault or not he could not say, and they had already commenced to drop toward the earth!

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN THE MONOPLANE FELL.

“Oh!”

Of course it was Andy who gave utterance to this startled exclamation. He had noticed the abrupt stoppage of the engine and realized what that must mean.

Frank never lost his head in this emergency. He had a faculty for thinking out all these sort of things and planning his move in case he ever found himself up against such a crisis. It is one thing to deliberately stop the motive power of an aeroplane and quite another to have it suddenly cease working.

The monoplane continued to move forward, under the impetus that had been given while the propeller still swirled around. But they were also descending and in a few seconds they would be apt to drop faster than ever, unless something were done to relieve the situation.

The planes were holding firmly and their expanse would serve to keep the little aircraft from going down like a plummet. But Frank knew there was a means for quickly altering the position of his deflecting rudder, so that the monoplane would glide gently ~~toward the~~

earth in what from a higher altitude would be called volplaning.

He had seen experienced aviators do the stunt again and again, and sometimes under circumstances that called for considerable nerve. So like a flash he made the move and the little craft seemed to feel the effect at once, floating softly down until presently the rubbered tires of the two fore wheels came in contact with the ground, along which they trundled for perhaps fifty feet.

Then the monoplane came to a full stop.

Andy broke loose with an ear splitting yell that was taken up by the others nearby, who believed that this must all have been intentional on the part of the novice air pilot.

Frank himself was satisfied and even pleased. He realized how easily one could hold the reins with such a novel craft, if he only did not lose his head in an emergency. There were ways to meet each sudden difficulty, it seemed.

"That was a mighty fine idea of yours, Frank; but it needed a lot of nerve to attempt it," said Andy, as he climbed out and stretched himself.

"Did, eh?" smiled Frank. "What would you think if I told you that I never had any

idea of coming down that way, just then, at any rate?"

The other stared.

"Say, you don't mean to tell me that it was all an accident?" Andy asked, his face growing grave again.

"It certainly was, so far as I know. I never intended to cut off the power. The engine simply stopped dead. And I knew that we would come down with a bump unless I did something that I've seen aviators do many the time. In a little way that was what they call volplaning, Andy."

"Gee! I bet those two guys stared like their eyes would jump out. That's something they haven't dared try yet, bold as they are," observed the other, looking up toward the biplane, which had wheeled and was coming back.

"And I wouldn't have dared either," laughed Frank; "only it was a case of have to with me. But now that it's over I'm glad it happened, for I've learned something that's going to be pretty valuable to us from now on. We can always alight that way. But I'll be sorry if our dandy little engine has gone back on us."

He bent over to examine and immediately uttered a snort.

"Found something?" asked Andy, while the other two boys drew alongside and the limping colonel drew rapidly near.

"A fool play on my part, after all. The power is shut off! I must have done it accidentally when I turned a trifle to watch the biplane."

Andy threw the propeller gears into neutral and then started the engine. It began working with an earnestness that was charming.

"That's one on me," said Frank. "And I give you my word I'll fix it so that it can never happen again."

"There comes the biplane bothering around," said Andy, who seemed to have conceived a sudden violent dislike for the other aeroplane.

The machine piloted by Puss was indeed circling and dropping to a lower strata, so that presently the voice of Sandy Hollingshead could be heard calling.

"Bet you couldn't do that again in a thousand years, Frank!" he said, as though he had just received an unpleasant shock after witnessing the feat of bringing the monoplane successfully to earth after the engine had stopped short.

After a while he would realize that it was

only a common way of alighting. Puss had managed thus far in a clumsy fashion, avoiding accidents more through good luck than management. For no aeroplane ever could make a landing with the engine running full.

"Thought you were in for a smash!" Puss admitted.

"Oh, well, you see I didn't intend to shut off power so suddenly. My sleeve caught in the lever and I thought something had broken. But it was easy after all," Frank sang out, not wishing to accept laurels he had not earned.

"Huh! thought it was an accident. You fellows will trust to luck once too often, mark my words!" Sandy called back as the biplane sailed away.

Andy would have willingly gone up again, but his more prudent chum advised that they let well enough alone.

"I want to do some little fixing to the engine," he said, "and I reckon you can think up a few more places to hunt for your pet tool."

And secretly Andy had something to ponder over. He realized more than ever that he would never be fitted to follow in the footsteps of his father, insofar as this matter of

aerial navigation went, unless he put a sharp curb on his impatience.

Frank was the right kind of fellow to attempt these things. He had a remedy for any trouble, and on the instant. The more Andy thought of that incident and the clever way in which his chum had grappled with the threatened disaster the greater his admiration for Frank grew.

Elephant, Larry and the old man were watching Frank tinker with the little engine out there on the field just where they had alighted. Of course, they talked the while, for boys can never keep silent any more than girls.

"I saw you swing to the left as you came down, Frank; why did you do that?" asked Larry, who had keen eyes that few things escaped.

"I did it because I knew we needed plenty of room ahead after we landed, so the machine could run along the ground a bit, for I haven't yet quite got the hang of the brake," replied the pilot, modestly.

"But how could you think of all that in a second and figure it out just how you wanted to land?" persisted the other.

"I didn't," Frank answered, promptly, after his usual candid fashion. "It must have been what you'd call instinct that made me

swerve. I realized it all just like you get an inspiration, in a tenth of a second, they say. And my brain must have wigwagged it down to my hand, for the thing was done in a flash."

"Gee! that's what an airship pilot has to do, does he?" observed Elephant, shaking his head sadly. "Then I guess I'm not in the running. Somehow the telegraph line between my brain and my fingers gets out of working order right along. Then the news has to be relayed, sometimes by way of another fellow. This here bully old earth is going to be good enough for a fellow of my size for some time yet."

"Yes, Elephant," said Larry, "if he makes a little blunder here he doesn't drop a few thousand feet, turning over and over, and landing with a sickening thud, as they say in the newspaper accounts."

"Ah! let up on that, won't you?" cried Andy. "You can't scare us and there's no use trying. My father took the chances before me and it's sure in the blood. No matter what you say about risks, I've just got to be an aviator. And I've laid out a trip that some day I hope to take."

Frank could give a guess as to what he meant when he said this, for that yearning look came upon Andy's face, just as it always

did every time he was thinking about the father who had so mysteriously vanished from the eyes of the known world so many months ago, when with his balloon he started to cross the isthmus of Panama and was seen no more.

"Anyway," asserted Larry, with an expression of genuine pleasure; "I'm satisfied now that you fellows mean to have a look-in when that silver cup is raced for. I had my doubts before, but after seeing the clever stunt Frank just pulled off I'm not worrying any more."

"Thank you, Larry," said Frank; "it makes a fellow feel good to have his friends express confidence in him. We mean to practice hard and learn all the ropes we can. Then, if our fine little engine can develop the speed I think she will, we'll show a clean pair of heels to our rivals on that big day of the race."

"Oh, I forgot something!" exclaimed Elephant just then, and he straightway began fumbling at his pocket as though trying to get a grip on an object concealed there. "I found some property belonging to you, Andy, and in the funniest place you ever heard of. Perhaps you remember losing it?"

Andy turned pale, then rosy red and expectant.

"My little aluminum monkey wrench?" he exclaimed, eagerly.

Even Frank looked up, waiting to see what happened. But Elephant shook his head in a disappointing fashion.

“Shucks, no!” he said; “but that tennis ball you lost last year, you know, over in the lot back of our court. We hunted high and low for it and gave the thing up. Well, would you believe it, if I didn’t come on the ball stuck tight in a crotch of a tree, and here it is, hardly worth anything, but I thought you’d like to see it again.”

But Andy groaned and waved him away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SCOUT, AND A DISCOVERY.

Several days passed.

With the exception of Sunday, the two wide-awake Bird boys put in all the time possible in learning the ropes. Whenever the weather was favorable they might be seen careering around the aviation field in their gallant little Bleriot monoplane, now rising to greater heights than they had ever dared venture before, and anon coming down in some daring "spiral" that evoked loud cheers from those who, from below, witnessed the new maneuver.

The biplane was also in evidence during these times. Puss Carberry was wise in his day and generation, however. He had awakened to the fact that in Frank and Andy Bird he had competitors worthy of his best steel, and that if he hoped to outgeneral them as rivals on the day of the race he must get busy.

So he and Sandy, instead of soaring aimlessly about, enjoying themselves, began to study the humor of their airy steed. They found plenty to do, for the vagaries of an aeroplane are numerous indeed.

Each pair of aviators had its particular little group of backers in the shape of boys, who

stared and cheered as they watched the evolutions and stunts which were successfully engineered.

Frank was taking no unnecessary risks. There were numerous things which of necessity they must learn, since at any moment during a flight such knowledge might be the means of saving their lives. And he went about the task of understanding just how volplaning down, boring up and such maneuvers are successfully accomplished by expert airmen, just as he did everything else he undertook, determined to be a master of the science before he finished.

It was now Tuesday. The great day was to be Friday, when on account of the attractive program laid out, it was believed there would be a greater crowd present in Bloomsbury than at any other time during Old Home Week.

By degrees the Bird boys had succeeded in mastering their machine, so that now even Andy could run it successfully. He was proud of the fact, and yet it might be noticed that he did not go around boasting.

Truth to tell, Andy had serious thoughts these days. In his mind he was perhaps picturing the time when he hoped to be able to scour the country down in that tangled wilderness of the isthmus, where his father's balloon

had vanished from the sight of mortal man. It was a solemn duty with Andy, and while he said very little about it, even to his chum, Frank could tell pretty well what was engrossing his thoughts.

On this afternoon the breeze had died out altogether, as is often the case in July. Although it was pretty hot, still the day was an ideal one for flying.

They had been working on the monoplane most of the morning, installing a searchlight, arranging a barometer close to the thermometer, so that the pilot could observe the action of the mercury without turning his head, and even fixing a new barograph in place. This last instrument Frank had sent for lately and was much interested in.

"Pretty soon we'll want to know how high we are flying, and this will register the top notch," he said, as they examined the instrument with interest.

"Makes me think of the self-registering thermometers I've seen," declared Andy. "You put one out over night and the mercury pushes down to a certain degree, which is marked as the limit. Then you can look at it any old time and know, after which you set the register again for another shy."

"Well," said Frank, "this does its work on

the same principle, in that it registers the highest point reached. When there is a contest on for height, I believe these registers are placed so there can be no tampering with them, and afterwards they are taken in charge by the committee and examined."

"Say, why not take advantage of this afternoon to make a little trip over in the direction of Old Thunder Top?" suggested Andy, eagerly.

Frank shook his head as he remarked:

"You forget that one of the conditions of entry to that race is that each contestant agreed not to go within a quarter of a mile of the mountaintop before the time set for the trial. The idea is that the one who succeeds may be the actual first person known to have ever set foot on the summit of the mountain."

"Oh, shucks! I haven't forgotten that!" exclaimed Andy, impatiently. "But we've stuck to our old field here, rising and circling, till I'm sick of seeing it. To tell the truth, I hunger and thirst for new pastures. There's nothing to hinder us from taking a lively spin of twenty miles, if we want, so long as we keep away from that plateau up yonder. Say yes, Frank!"

Of course the idea appealed to his cousin

with equal force and he could not resist Andy's plea.

"All right, then. I suppose it would be a good idea to take a little spin somewhere," he said. "We've mastered the machine pretty well for novices."

"Yes," continued Andy, with a sly grin, "and it ain't any harder off there in the forest, in case we fall from five hundred feet, than here in the open. Fact is, we might have a better chance by lighting in the branches of a big oak or a chestnut."

"Well, let's get ready to make the venture," said Frank, rising to his feet; "but I hope all the same that we may not have to try that drop you joke about. One thing we can do is to climb up so as to get a line on how high Old Thunder Top really is. There's always been a hot dispute about that, you know."

"That's so," observed the other, scurrying around in search of things. "I've heard a high school teacher say it was not over seven hundred feet, as distance was so deceptive. And on the other hand, a surveyor who was used to judging distance told me he felt sure it would go much beyond a thousand feet. Now we'll get a line on it, and the day of the race the facts will be known to a dead certainty."

In a short time both air boys were ready for the flight.

“Put on your coat, Andy,” advised Frank, on seeing that his chum was about to take his place in his shirt sleeves. “While it’s oppressively hot down here, don’t you know that five hundred feet up the air will be chilly. And if we are moving at the rate of a mile a minute, you’ll be wishing you had your sweater on, mark my words.”

Andy smiled, but all the same he donned his coat. Frank knew, for there was precious little that escaped him. And Andy, as a rule, was quite satisfied to take pattern by his wide-awake cousin.

There were a few fellows hanging around. It was holiday time and on such a hot day they cared precious little for baseball or any other sport requiring exertion. In their minds it was much finer watching what the Bird boys would do next, for by now all of juvenile Bloomsbury had been seized with a severe attack of what Andy called “aviatus,” and numerous projects for building aircraft were being discussed in homes and on the commons.

As usual there was a whoop of pure delight from the gathered boys when the little monoplane started upward. None of them had been taken into the secret of what new stunts were

to be undertaken, but they anticipated that Frank and Andy must have something up their sleeves—they looked so mysterious after that conference.

The aeroplane rose with not the slightest hitch. They were getting so accustomed to handling the machine by now that it seemed second nature to accomplish a successful rise. Indeed, as yet there had not been the slightest serious accident to alarm them, since the engine was cut off so suddenly on that first day.

After circling the field a few times at furious speed, "just to get his hand in," as Frank said, the pilot turned the nose of the little flier straightaway in an easterly direction.

To their ears was borne the faint whoops from the cluster of envious boys left on the aviation field, as they realized what sort of new program the young aviators had on tap.

"How high are we now?" asked Andy, as he craned his neck and looked down upon the country that lay far below, and which was spread out for miles in all directions around them.

Frank laughed.

"Why," said he, "you seem to forget that it isn't necessary any longer to depend on guesswork, when you've got that hunky little

barograph almost under your nose. Suppose you just take a squint and inform me."

"Sure, pop!" exclaimed Andy, radiantly. "I had just forgotten all about that new contrivance. Hey! what d'ye think Frank, we're sailing along right now about seven hundred feet up. Phew! that's going some for new beginners, eh?"

"It's fine. I don't think we'd better go any further just now, but drop down to within a couple of hundred, and see how the lake and the woods look up this way."

"But before you begin to go down, Frank, I want you to take a squint over toward Old Thunder Top. Just notice, will you, that while we're now up seven hundred, that summit is still higher—several hundred feet, I reckon."

"Which shows how little that teacher knew," Frank observed. "Why, we've been up to the foot of that big cliff many a time and if we'd only had this little business along we'd soon found out that it was close on a thousand there. Now sit close, for I'm going to spiral down a bit."

They began to move around in circles in dropping, as the engine was throttled down. By now Frank had this little trick down to a science, though he refused to try and show

off at any time and thus take unnecessary risks.

When the aeroplane had reached a level of about two hundred feet from the earth, the engine was once more accelerated and they resumed their steady onward progress.

"It's sure a treat to look down on the lake like this. Beats the view from up on the side of the mountain all hollow," presently remarked Andy.

"Why, yes," said his companion, as he swerved just a trifle to follow the contour of the water lying below; "because in this way we can see the shore line all around."

"And now, as we're at the head of the lake, which way shall we return, Frank?"

"Let's veer off and cover a few miles of country beyond the mountain," the pilot ventured. "It's wild up here and as a rule none of us know much about it. Look at the woods, how thick they are, with only a little opening here and there. I remember once how we came up here to camp and the snakes were so bad we soon tired of it."

"That's so!" Andy exploded. "I hate snakes worse than I do skunks. Looky here! if that ain't our old friend Baldy, skating around to take a squint at the new-fangled bird that's invaded his exclusive territory.

Hey! won't he be surprised, though, when we land up there on Old Thunder Top Friday? Perhaps the old chap may tackle us; we'd better take a gun along to be prepared."

But Frank laughed at the idea.

"That would hardly be according to the rules of the race. If we want to make fast time we don't want to load ourselves down with all sorts of traps, Andy."

"I guess you're on," the other remarked. "But say, this country is pretty rough, all right. I was just thinking what a splendid thing an aeroplane must be in wartimes. A fellow could soar over the enemy and learn everything that was going on. I can see a big change in our ways of fighting when the next war comes along."

"Oh!"

"What ails you, Frank?" demanded Andy, as he heard his companion give vent to this exclamation, for naturally his nerves were all on edge with excitement.

"I saw something just then, that's all. When you look down don't bend over and give the fact away that you're looking. We're just passing over a little opening in the dense woods. I remember that it is close to that old dilapidated cabin we found when camping up here. Used to be occupied by charcoal burners

once on a time. They had a scrap and one man was badly hurt, while the other disappeared."

"Sure, I remember," said Andy; "but what of that, Frank?"

"Look in that glade and you'll get a glimpse of two fellows hiding. They dropped down in the grass at sight of the airship and are watching us," said Frank, quickly.

"I declare that's so; but who are they, and why do you act that way?" asked the puzzled Andy.

"Now we've passed over. Don't turn your head back for anything, because, Andy, that was Jules and his pal, the robbers Chief Waller has been hunting high and low for so long!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HELPING OUT THE CHIEF.

"Wow! that's some news, Frank!" cried Andy, doubtless thrilled by what the pilot of the monoplane had just said.

"I'm positive about it," the other went on. "Of course, it would be hard to tell a fellow standing up when you were sailing over his head and two hundred feet high, but in this case these fellows were lying down. And I saw their faces, too."

"Well, why not?" remarked his cousin, thoughtfully. "We've believed all along they must be hiding out somewhere in the woods. And Frank, what better place could they find than that old cabin? It's lonely enough, goodness knows. And there are farms not more than two miles away, where they might forage for chickens, eggs and such things."

"Just what they're doing, I guess," remarked Frank.

"And say, didn't I just hit it right when I remarked about the value of aeroplanes in wartime?" observed the passenger, with a self-satisfied chuckle.

"You certainly did; but then, that has been

recognized as a fact for some time now. They're even using flying machines down on the Mexican border to locate the doings of the hostile forces. Our government has a regular aeroplane corps, you know, Andy. And after this no nation dare go without, for that would be putting them at a terrible disadvantage."

"And so those rascals have been bunking in that old cabin all this time?" mused Andy. "Like as not they went there right after missing our airship that night. But if they're hanging around here, Frank, don't you think they mean to make another try for this craft? Some fine night they'll break in again and give us a scare for our money."

"Well," said Frank, quietly, "you know since that time I've never failed to fix it every night so that the engine could not be run. It's easy as falling off a log to hide some important little part and render the whole thing useless. But now that we've got a hunch about their hiding place, we must let Chief Waller know. He can come up here this very night and grab the precious pair."

"I agree with you," Andy hastened to say. "To tell the honest truth, Pard Frank, I'll never be easy till Jules and Jean are safely in the cooler. I'm afraid they've got it in for a couple of fellows I know. And if they

crept in on us some night they'd just *make* you tell where you had put that missing part of the engine, even if they had to torture us. I know the breed. They're a cruel, cold-blooded lot, and I want to see 'em caged!"

"Oh, well," Frank continued, "it'll be up to the chief. Unless he makes a fizzle of the whole business he ought to gather them in easy. But let's turn now."

"Are you going back the same way?" asked the other, burning with eagerness.

"I think not, Andy. That might make them suspect we had glimpsed something and were coming to make sure. We'd better fight shy of that glade and take a wide sweep around. Besides, it's a farming country over yonder and worth looking down at."

"Yes," said his cousin, quickly, "and it's sure a sight to see the rustics breaking their blessed necks looking up. Everybody runs out of the house like it was afire. I only hope we don't come across such a fool as one I read about the other day.

"Why, what did he do?" queried Frank.

"Hanged if he didn't blaze away with a shotgun at a poor aviator. Lucky the man happened to be up too high, or he'd have been filled full of bird shot. There's no telling what some of these jay fools might do. They think

it's a big hawk, perhaps one of those giant roc birds old Sindbad the Sailor used to ride on. But look down, Frank; there's the first farm. See the men in the field shaking their fists at us! Now, what in the dickens are they doing that for, d'ye suppose?"

Frank laughed as he replied:

"I've an idea that perhaps they've been missing poultry of late and take it for granted we're the up-to-date thieves. They believe anything bad of people who ride in automobiles or fly in new-fangled airships, you know."

"Oh, you mean that Jules and his pal have been doing their little stunt around here?" said Andy, jumping at conclusions. "And now we've got to shoulder the blame of that bad business? Well, it's one consolation, then, that after the pair have been jugged we can drop down and tell this family all about it. I'd like to clear my skirts of any such nasty reputation."

Frank gradually veered the course until they were heading for the home field.

"All told," he said, "I think our little excursion was a success."

"A howling success," grinned Andy; "especially the last part, where the farmer and his family gave us a tongue lashing which was all a jumble to us."

"By the way, I don't think we'd better say anything about those two men while the boys are around. A little later, Andy, we can get on our wheels and take a spin to town, where we will tell the chief all about it."

"Just as you say," returned Andy. "I was thinking myself that one of the boys might happen to leak and some friend of the fellows get wind of it. Then he'd warn them and the police would have all their trouble for their pains. But you really do believe they're camping out in the old Badger shack, don't you?"

"Looks like it," was all Frank would say.

Presently they came in sight of the field and the hangar. The boys were still on deck to receive them and ask a myriad of questions.

"There goes the biplane off," remarked Andy, as they started to wheel their little airship back into its snug quarters, after Frank had closely examined every part, machinery and framework, to make sure it was in "apple-pie" trim.

"Yes," returned his cousin, pausing to look, "and they're going to take something of the same trip we made. Puss evidently don't want the Bird boys to get ahead of him, if he can help it. And I must say he's doing far better handling that biplane of his than I ever dreamed he could."

Ten minutes later they fastened the doors of the shed.

"Elephant says he'll hang around while we go to town," remarked Andy, who did not want to miss the treat of seeing the pompous chief, when he learned that after all his labor in trying to locate the hiding rascals it was the two Bird boys who had found out where they were in concealment.

"That's all right," Frank went on. "I was a trifle uneasy about leaving things alone here, though, of course, it's ridiculous to think any harm could come to the shed in broad daylight."

"Well," remarked the doubting Andy, "there's a crowd that has little use for us, you know, and some of them are thick with Sandy and Puss. I feel dead sure there are one or two among the lot so low down, that if they had the chance they'd just like to throw a lighted match in our shed and watch things burn from the woods over yonder. I hate to say it, but that's a fact."

"Well, I'm not disputing you, because I've known them to do some mighty mean things myself. But get your wheel, Andy. I'm glad now you brought mine over yesterday when you dropped in to carry my message to father. He thinks it just the boss thing for me to be

sleeping outdoors every night. You know his fad, though; and it's pie for me."

It took them but a short time to arrive in the heart of the town. Dropping off at police headquarters they entered the building. The chief was there luckily, and at sight of the Bird boys he showed sudden signs of interest. Somehow, people had of late awakened to the fact that things were generally moving when Frank and Andy were around. There was "something doing," so to speak. And so people began to expect more or less of them.

"Glad to see you, boys," said Chief Waller, unbending his dignity enough to extend a hand to each and even smile. "Dropped in to have a talk about those clever rascals who tried to do you out of your new aeroplane? Sorry I can't say they're in the cooler. My men have several clues they're running down, and we hope to be able to report something soon."

It was always "something doing soon" with the chief. He had a way of forever being on the point of making a grand coup, but singular to relate, no one could remember of past successes that had rewarded his vigilance. Still, he was useful in his way and had a pull with the town fathers that kept him his job year after year.

"Oh!" burst out the impulsive Andy, "we

just dropped in to say that we believe we know where those bad men are hiding!"

"Have chairs," exclaimed the chief. "Sit down and tell me all about it, please."

"Why," Andy went on, Frank having motioned to him to do the talking, "this afternoon, as we were taking a spin in our aeroplane, we happened to pass over the woods up near that old Badger shack, and we saw two men lying down in the grass, trying to hide so we wouldn't notice 'em. It was Jules and Jean, as sure as shooting, and we believe they're camping in that cabin!"

The police head showed signs of sudden animation.

"Why, boys," he said, slapping his hand down on his knee, "would you believe it, now. I was just thinking of that old shack when you came in. See, here's a chart of the whole county and that's one of the places I had my eye on. But all the same, I'm real glad you came to tell me, boys. Now I'll feel positive and we can surround the place. Would you like to go along with us tonight, Frank?"

But Frank shook his head in the negative as he replied:

"Thanks, but I guess we've got all the work cut out for us we can handle, chief. We believed you'd want to keep it a secret, for fear

that they had some friends in town who might carry a warning. But we'll move on now. Hope you have success and make a haul. Come on, Andy, let's get back home!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE AEROPLANE RACE.

“Frank, we’re in great luck!”

“I think so myself, Andy,” replied the taller of the cousins, as he coolly bent down to adjust some little thing about the engine of the monoplane.

“Here it’s past noon on the great day! Six thousand good people have gathered on the field here and on the neighboring fences just to see us fly, and there isn’t a mite of wind. I say it’s the greatest luck ever,” and Andy, who was hubbbling all over with enthusiasm, turned to look around at the vast throngs.

The two aeroplanes had been taken to the field where the sports of the wonderful Old Home Week at Bloomsbury were being carried out.

All through the morning there had been foot racing, athletic games, and a host of similar amusements that gave the people many thrills and made them glad that they were in the home town at such a time. But the greatest event of the whole week was scheduled for that afternoon at two, when, wind and weather permitting, two home-manufactured aeroplanes, piloted by boys of Bloomsbury, ex-

pected to compete for a silver cup, supposed to have been offered by the committee, but which we happen to know had been purchased by genial old Colonel Josiah Whympers, guardian of our hero, Andy Bird.

The conditions of the race were well understood. They had even been printed, so that no one might rest in ignorance concerning their nature.

Both aeroplanes were to be started at the same time, so there would be no advantage on either side. Then the first to successfully land on the summit of Old Thunder Top mountain and plant an American flag where the foot of man had, up to now, never touched, was to be declared the winner.

There was to be no jockeying or trickery. The committee, again inspired by the colonel, who understood the ways of boys and especially of the Puss Carberry stripe, had made it plain that any attempt to interfere, outside of an accident, would disqualify the guilty party from receiving the fine prize.

Of course, there were few among the vast throng who had ever set eyes on an airship, save as they may have seen either of the contestants flying about Bloomsbury while trying out their machines.

The enthusiasm was intense. Everywhere

people gathered in clusters to compare notes. Of course, there were adherents of both contestants. Sometimes this came through personal feeling, each pilot having his circle of champions among the boys of the town, although four out of five favored Frank, on account of his fine, manly disposition.

Nevertheless, there were many who believed that a biplane could easily outdistance a monoplane in a race, and it was laughable to hear these people, who were in reality so densely ignorant on the subject, standing up staunchly for what they believed to be the better type of air flier.

A rope had been stretched around the space where the two aeroplanes rested and no one was allowed within this enclosure, unless at the wish of the contestants. Chief Waller had all his force on the ground and a number of temporary policemen had been taken on for the week of hilarity, so that the crowds were handled fairly well.

At a quarter to two the people were to be pressed back all along the line, for when the word was given the contesting air craft would require a certain space in which to flash over the field before taking wings and soaring aloft.

No wonder Andy trembled with excitement as he gazed upon the sea of upturned and

expectant faces that centered on the enclosure as the time drew near for the start.

"It's only wanting ten minutes now, Frank!" he remarked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Brace up, Andy," said the other, with a frown. "You mustn't allow yourself to get in that shape. Remember all you've learned and how you managed to keep your head cool yesterday in a trying time. Make up your mind we're just going to get up on that old mountain before the other fellows have a chance to beat us. There's Puss, just as excited as you, but he never shows it. Don't let them see that you are trembling all over. It weakens our chances!"

Somehow it seemed to give Andy's heart a new impetus to know that he was not the only one who was in a quake.

"All right, Frank, I'll be in trim once we get a decent start. But I'm in a funk now for fear something will go wrong with the glide-off. If they get a start of us we're going to be in the soup!" he said, anxiously.

"Oh, rats! Don't you know they're just as possible to have trouble in making the start as we are? Just make up your mind both of us are going to get away as neatly as we usu-

ally do, and that the race is going to be to the swift."

"But I've heard lots of people sing the praises of that Gnome engine they've got in the biplane. It does its work with a rush!" observed Andy.

"All right. We simply believe we've got a much better one in the new and light little Kinkaid. And we're just going to prove it!" continued Frank, positively.

"Well, it hasn't failed us even once so far, for a fact," admitted Andy; "and I guess I'm a fool for doubting it now. I'm hoping that later on that same motor will be buzzing away down in a country where there won't be any crowd to watch how we get along. Five minutes now, Frank!"

"Get in your place then and be ready. Seconds may count with us and we don't ever want to be caught unprepared!" said the pilot of the monoplane, as he cast a last look over everything that would have to do with the success or failure of the flight.

That was always Frank Bird's slogan—*be prepared!* He hit the nail on the head when he declared that readiness was almost half the battle. That was what won the war for Germany, when France started operations so suddenly away back in 1870. The army north of

the Rhine was a vast machine and every single member of it knew just what was expected of him when the time came!

So wise Frank had carefully sized up the present situation. He had mapped out in his mind just what sort of emergencies were liable to occur in a race of this kind, and settled in advance how he could best meet, and grapple with them in case of need.

He knew just how the wind was apt to strike them after they had risen to a certain height, and also what sort of clever manoeuvres would best counteract the effect of a head breeze, that must increase as they neared the mountain crest.

On the other hand, Puss Carberry never bothered his head about such trifles. He expected the superior speeding capacity of his big biplane to carry him to victory, regardless of anything his rival might attempt in the way of aerial strategy.

Possibly, ere the competition came to a close, Puss might have learned a lesson he would not be apt to soon forget—that often these same trifles may win or lose a battle, whether on the field of war, or in an aeroplane competition for a prize.

The five minutes was gradually growing less, and of course the excitement increased in

consequence, until it was at fever heat. Heads were craned, and people pushed hither and thither, seeking new points of advantage. For while they readily understood that both airships could be easily watched, once they rose from the ground, everybody wanted to witness with their own eyes the curious and interesting dash along the field that would be a necessary forerunner of the flight.

All sorts of instruments had been fetched along, which might prove useful when the contestants were nearing the summit of Old Thunder Top. Here a lady had a pair of pearl-mounted opera glasses, that perhaps had once been leveled at a Patti, perhaps dating back even to a Jenny Lind. Beside her would be a farmer, who had a telescope of brass, one of the ancient kind used on board ships many decades back, and which was undoubtedly an heirloom in his family.

Then there were numerous up-to-date field and marine glasses; while others depended on their clear eyesight to tell them which aeroplane touched first the up-to-now never explored crown of the grim old mountain, with its range of cliffs rebuffing would-be climbers.

Two minutes more!

A great hush had fallen on the throng. Every eye doubtless was glued on the little en-

closure, and the two distinct groups collected about the rival air craft.

The master of ceremonies had assumed charge. He warned both contestants once more to play the game fairly, telling them that the danger was great enough without either taking unnecessary risks in making a foul.

Signals had been arranged whereby the discharge of cannon were to serve as a warning against interference. One shot would direct Frank to steer clear, while a double report meant that the biplane was cutting dangerously across the path of its rival, and must sheer off under penalty of being disqualified.

They knew Puss in Bloomsbury. His reputation as a lover of clean sport was none too good. There were many who anticipated that if he saw that his chances in the race were practically hopeless, Puss Carberry would not hesitate to do some mean trick, and stoutly claim that it was an accident—that his steering apparatus had fouled, causing him to collide with the slighter monoplane.

Of course this was a most foolhardy thing to dream of doing, since a foul in midair might not only send his rivals down to death, but imperil his own life. And yet there were those among his own chums who winked knowingly as they talked over things in low voices,

and assured each other that Puss was bound to win, or know the reason why.

Frank had his own private opinion on this subject. He had long made Puss Carberry a study, and believed he had the other pretty well sized up. He was a peculiar combination of a boy, bold at times almost to rashness; and again cautious beyond imagination. And Frank knew that there was constant war within him between the good and the bad, though on nearly all occasions the latter predominated.

He had made up his mind that Puss was too shrewd to risk such a thing as a collision in midair. If he attempted any of his customary dirty work it would come in an altogether different way.

All who were not to have a part in the starting of the aeroplanes had been pressed beyond the ropes. To have no advantage on either side, and make the start exactly fair, a certain number had been limited as assistants.

“Are you ready for the start!”

It was the master of ceremonies who called this out in a loud voice.

“Silence! silence!” went from lip to lip; and several groups of giggling girls felt the rebuke enough to subside.

“Ready!” called out Frank, promptly,

while Andy took a big breath, and gripped the upright beside him nervously.

Both of them had their eyes on the course in front. Frank saw that it was practically clear of people, so that the chances of any trouble were reduced to a minimum. He was glad of this, because if the contestants were recalled to try for another start the strain would be almost unbearable.

He heard Puss answer "all ready, Judge," after a trifling delay, as though he might have thought of some slight change at the very last second.

Then came a brief period of suspense. Perhaps it was only a few seconds, while the starter glanced to right and left to make sure that everything was as it should be, and the track clear. But to poor Andy it seemed as though the delays were interminable, and that an hour must have elapsed.

He was impelled to turn his head, and see what the Judge could be doing; but remembering the positive instructions given by his cousin, he resolutely shut his jaws, and refrained.

Would the signal never come? Those who were to assist in launching the aerial craft had assumed an attitude of expectancy. Their muscles were set, and they stood ready to give

the initial push as the propellers started whirling.

Suddenly the loud voice of the starter rang out, sharp and clear:

"Then go!"

CHAPTER XXI.

HEADED FOR THE SUMMIT OF OLD THUNDER TOP.

Instantly, as it seemed, there were loud exclamations, accompanied by all signs of bustle and excitement. The engines began to snap, and both aeroplanes started down the slight descent, which had been selected as best suited for their initial forward movement.

Whether the boys who handled the biplane were more alert, or it was really true that they started a fraction of a second before the signal was given, as some afterward affirmed—no matter, the one result was that Puss and Sandy left the ground just a trifle in advance of their competitors.

Perhaps this trifling advantage might prove of great benefit to them ere the end of the race came—no one dared prophesy just then.

But now both airships were rapidly rising, and heading in almost a direct line for the distant mountain. A roar of shouts arose from all over the wide territory, where thousands of intensely interested people clustered. Hats and handkerchiefs were wildly waved in the air, and some of the more enthusiastic boys threw their head gear as high as they could.

There was no answer from either of the whizzing air craft. Those who navigated the upper regions of space had learned long before now that under no circumstances must they allow their attention to be diverted for even a second from the business in hand.

Even Andy had his duties to perform. Frank had exercised his inventive genius, and arranged some sort of pendulum contrivance underneath the body of the monoplane, that in a measure did away with the dizzy rolling motion of which his companion had formerly complained. It had been tested on the preceding day, and appeared to work well; so that Andy was now able to attend strictly to business, and not spend most of his time trying to keep an equilibrium.

The biplane had kept on rising, even after Frank brought his craft on an even keel. He wondered what the meaning of this movement could be. At the moment all he could think of was that Puss believed he would be able to make better direct time if he kept just fifty feet above the line of flight adopted by his rival.

The shouts became dimmer as they left the aviation field further in their wake. Still they knew that every eye was focused on their movements, and hundreds of glasses

brought into use to note every little movement of the two rival craft.

Frank seemed just as calm and collected as though he had been going off on an ordinary little trip, to give the engine a warming-up. From where he sat he could watch the working of the wonderful little Kinkaid engine; for in a monoplane it is always secured before the pilot. Some aviators incline to call this an advantage, because with a biplane the engine must of necessity be back of the navigator.

He and Andy could converse without trouble, should the spirit move them. True, with the little engine doing its liveliest, and the muffler not throttled in the least, there arose a necessity for raising the voice a trifle in order to be heard even a foot away; but Andy had good lungs.

"Frank, they're holding the advantage!" he exclaimed, when they had been moving along for another minute, and heading almost straight for the summit of the high mountain.

Looking down, Andy could see the trees of the forest far below. A thousand feet, yes, possibly twelve hundred, they had risen without making use of the usual method of "bor-ing" for altitude. It was really higher than as yet they had dared venture. Still, strange

to say, Andy did not feel the least particle of fear in connection with any possible tumble.

His anxiety was concentrated upon the chances of the biplane leading them all the way along the journey, just as though it were a procession, and Puss the grand marshal.

"I know it," replied Frank, without showing any concern.

"But we must break into their pace better than this, if we hope to win!" declared Andy, who had taken a look upward, to see the grinning face of Sandy Hollingshead turned down toward them, just as though he already scented victory in the air.

"Don't you worry, Andy!" Frank simply said.

"Are you holding back anything?" demanded the other, eagerly.

"A little. We can do better. Just wait, and trust me!"

Andy breathed more easily. When Frank spoke like that it always gave him a new lease on hope. That came of knowing his cousin so well, and having such perfect confidence in his sterling abilities. When Frank Bird said "Have faith, and trust me to pull through," Andy was ready to believe almost anything could happen.

So he once more turned his eyes on the cap of the great mountain which they were approaching at a rapid rate.

Old Thunder Top was indeed an imposing spectacle as seen from a level. Of course, in the eyes of real mountaineers, the elevation would have been a trifle, and they might have spoken of it as a mere "foothill"; but to all loyal Bloomsbury boys it was always referred to with respect, as the "Mountain"! Perhaps the fact of those queer cliffs preventing any one from reaching the summit added to the admiration with which it was gazed upon. Had the boys been accustomed to picnicking upon that top whenever they pleased, it must have lost much of its grandeur.

Frank had judged wisely.

"We are on a direct line with the top, don't you think?" he asked presently.

"As near as I can say, we are," replied the other, as the monoplane veered just a trifle when a gust of wind, coming from beyond the peak, met her, and Frank manipulated his aerial steed after a clever fashion he had inaugurated.

"If anything, a little higher," continued Frank.

"Yes, that's a fact," assented Andy, with another keen look.

"That's what I wanted. Sure you've got that flag handy, are you?" went on the pilot of the speeding monoplane.

"Just you get there, and you'll see how soon I jump out and wave it!" declared Andy, with a vim.

Frank looked up.

The biplane still led, though by a narrow margin. At the same time, if the relative distance were maintained to the close of the race, Puss and Sandy would be able to land on the level plateau of the mountain top a few seconds before them, and that would win out.

And Frank had now to decide in his active mind whether the vital second had not arrived when he meant to release the little extra speed he had been so jealously husbanding ever since they started.

He believed that Puss had opened his throttle to its widest extent from the beginning, and would not have any reserve force left. Knowing the reckless nature of his rival gave him this idea. If it proved true, there was nothing to be feared, and they could outdistance the biplane without difficulty.

The mountain top was now near enough for them to see the formation of the rock. It was a matter of considerable moment whether

there was a level space large enough to allow of a landing in safety; for an aeroplane cannot stop in twenty feet of clear ground when going at speed.

The sun was now starting down its western journey, and unfortunately it interfered to some extent with a clear view. Frank had even thought of this. It was of tremendous importance to him that he knew just what he had to expect when he attempted to land on top of that pile of rock; and in order to assist his eyesight he had fastened a pair of good field glasses, so that he could glue his eyes to them for a couple of seconds, while the monoplane was shooting along in a direct course.

The result satisfied him that his little scheme had paid, for he made a mental photograph of the plateau, and noted just which side offered the better advantage in the way of a landing place.

But now the decisive second was at hand when he must release his little reserve speed, and send the monoplane on a trifle faster.

Much depended on the result. If Puss had been wise enough to do the same thing he would be able to retain the advantage which he now possessed, perhaps even add to the gap between them.

And so it was with more or less trepidation that Frank gave his throttle its very last push.

“Oh!” exclaimed Andy, who of course felt the little jump which this new impetus gave the already drumming motor.

Of course the ever watchful Sandy, from his eyrie above, would immediately discover this maneuver on the part of the rival aeroplane, and communicate the news to his companion.

What then? Would the pilot of the biplane simply follow suit, and thus increase the speed of his craft? That would be the logical deduction, if only Puss had any surplus in reserve.

Andy was on the watch, for that was a part of his business. Having little else to do, since Frank managed the engine and the tail rudder entirely, he was expected to discover, and report, everything that might bear in the least on their chances.

And Andy immediately gave utterance to a low cry of delight. Even had he not spoken a single word Frank would have known full well that they were now rapidly closing the little gap that up to now had stood between the monoplane and its larger rival.

“We’re going to run past them, - rank!” exclaimed Andy, doubtless quivering with con-

centrated nervousness and delight. "Already we've cut their lead down by half! Oh! don't poor old Sandy looked scared now! We've got them on the run, Frank, as sure as you live!"

But Frank made no answer. Perhaps a slight smile, as of pleasure, may have crossed his set face. Only too well did he know that when Puss Carberry was concerned, a fellow could never be positive of having won until the line were actually crossed; and even then it was his favorite stunt to claim "foul!"

To tell the truth, Frank would be very much easier in his mind when once they were clear of that hovering biplane, whose Gnome engine was banging away just above them as though scores of guns were being discharged in rapid succession.

The suspicion that had flashed athwart his mind earlier in the race now returned in double force; he feared lest those reckless rivals, ready to take the most desperate chances rather than confess to defeat, would attempt one of their customary mean tricks.

That may have been why, in the very beginning, Puss had insisted upon keeping at a higher level than the other aeroplane! It gave him the privilege of seeing how his rival might be coming on, without craning his neck.

It also opened up an opportunity for something to drop, of course accidentally, just when the smaller air craft was forging ahead!

Frank drew a long breath. He knew that the crisis of the race was now upon him. The speed of the biplane had not increased by even a fraction, which fact proved plainly that Puss had not held anything in reserve.

Then it looked very much as though Puss and his chum were bound to be beaten, unless they adopted some underhand tactics, trusting to the distance, and the little haze encountered at this height, to screen their despicable action from the eyes of those who looked through all those glasses.

And Andy too must have feared something of the sort, for he was keeping his eyes fastened on the biplane, now almost directly overhead. Frank knew that he must meet the sudden emergency, if one arose, with quickness, if he meant to prevent a catastrophe. He was resolutely determined not to slow down, and allow the others to gain a victory they had not earned; that was not Frank Bird's way.

"Oh! he's going to drop something on us, Frank!" cried Andy, suddenly.

"Who is—Sandy?" demanded the other.
"Give me a push as it leaves his hand!"

Andy did not understand, but he was in the habit of minding what Frank said; and three seconds later he brought his elbow sharply against the pilot's side.

Sandy had let go above, allowing the bulky object to fall through space!

CHAPTER XXII.

WELL WON!

Instantly Frank closed the throttle, and shut off all power!

It was taking a big chance; but there was nothing else to be done. No matter what it was Sandy had let slip, expecting that it would fall upon the monoplane, to at least cause consternation, and in some way lessen the speed of the smaller craft, Frank did not mean that it should strike them, if he knew it.

Of course their speed instantly slackened; not much, perhaps, but just enough to allow of a miss in the calculations of the unscrupulous Sandy.

Some object whizzed past, just in advance of the now descending monoplane. Immediately it went by, Frank, under the belief that the danger was now over, once more carefully opened the throttle.

Joy! the faithful little Kinkaid answered to the call, and began to renew its former volleying. Once more they were going along swiftly, though a bit lower than when the sudden emergency had caused such prompt work on the part of the wideawake pilot.

Frank shot a look upward.

The biplane had not diminished its speed an iota all this while. Puss was attending to his part of the business, leaving all other matters in the care of his well groomed assistant.

Both of them were leaning forward, staring down and backward at the monoplane. Even at that distance Frank could see that their faces were as white as chalk, as though the enormity of what they had done now burst upon them. Perhaps they may even have felt a spasm of relief at that moment, because the sand bag which had been dropped had missed its intended target, thanks to Frank's ready wit.

Now the monoplane seemed to be pushing forward with more speed than ever, as if bent on making up for lost time. And Frank was rising, too, for he knew he must of necessity find himself *above* the crown of the mountain, when ready to alight.

"What was that they dropped?" he asked of Andy.

"Looked like a sand bag," replied the other; "but whatever would they be doing with such a thing in a biplane?"

"That was what I wanted to know," replied Frank, "when I saw it tied there with a cord;

and Puss explained that he and Sandy were not quite heavy enough. Said their experiments had proved the biplane could make faster time with a little more weight!"

"He just lied!" burst out the indignant Andy. "A hundred to one they took that sand bag up with them on purpose to drop it on us if we tried to pass. And look how he kept hovering up there. That gives him away, I tell you!"

"Perhaps he got the idea from hearing how that other sand bag came down on our lumber pile, nearly squashing us while we slept!" observed Frank.

"Well, he only had one, didn't he?" questioned Andy, showing considerable nervousness; for they were now once more directly under the biplane.

"Only one, so the trick can't be duplicated," answered Frank, confidently.

"I wouldn't put it past that sneak Sandy, to let a monkey wrench drop on us, if he could lay hands on one," cried Andy; and then raising his voice he shouted: "Hey! don't you dare try that trick again! Accidents don't happen twice in succession; and they'll hang you for murder if anything knocks us out. They can see everything that goes on up here!"

Possibly this was stretching it pretty lively; but all the same Andy meant to frighten Sandy, so that he would not dream of following up a blunder by a second miserable attempt.

"It's too late, anyhow!" said Frank, with a vibration in his voice that might be caused by anticipated triumph.

"Yes, we're passing them, as sure as you live! Look at the poor old biplane dropping out of the race, Frank! Why, it might just as well stand still as try to keep up with this dandy little airship, once you pull the throttle wide open! We've got 'em beat to a frazzle, I tell you! Goodbye, fellows. We'll wait for you on top of old Blitzen and Thunder! Sorry, but somebody's got to eat the drumsticks of the turkey!"

Andy was feeling immensely relieved. The monoplane no longer ranged under its larger opponent. Superior speed, backed by careful management, had given them the lead. And as Andy declared, it looked as though the race might end in a real Garrison finish, the one behind shooting to the front when on the home stretch.

No matter what they would have liked to do, Puss and Sandy were now helpless to hinder the triumphal arrival of their rivals on top

of the mountain. Everything depended on the success that might attend Frank, when making his drop. Should he make a bad job of it, and shoot beyond the other edge of the plateau, possibly after all the others might be the first to land. It was their only hope.

Frank knew what he had before him. He was keenly alive to the chances of making a poor landing. And like a wise general he had anticipated all such things before now, even practicing stopping within a certain limited space when going at full speed.

"We're high enough, all right, Frank!" cried Andy reassuringly, as they swooped down toward the top of the ominous cliffs that had always barred their gaining lodgment on the crown of Old Thunder Top.

"Yes, no doubt about that, Andy," returned the other, confidently. "Now, be ready for your part. Remember, not to blunder, or we may lose out yet. They are coming hotfooted after us, you know!"

"I'll remember. You can trust me, Frank!"

Really, Andy was showing commendable grit and steadiness as the termination of the fierce race through the upper currents of the air drew nearer and nearer its termination. There was hope that in time he might con-

quer that nervousness of his, and play his part as a worthy successor to his famous father, the professor.

Like a great bird they sailed straight for the plateau marking the flat top of the elevation. Frank could even see the nest of sticks and grass that marked the home of the two great kings of the air, the bald eagles, now circling around overhead, and evidently greatly excited at the coming of these astonishing creatures, with their loud crackling voices.

“Say, you don’t think they’ll tackle us, and knock us off the rocks?” cried Andy, who had also been taking notice of the wheeling birds, now swooping down, and anon rising higher on outspread pinions.

“Keep an eye on ’em!” was all Frank could say; for just then they were close to the outer edge of the plateau, and his entire attention had to be focused upon what was before him, since one little misjudgment might bring about the ruination of his plans, however admirably fashioned.

Andy had already clutched the little pole to which the National emblem was fastened, so that not a second might be lost in giving it to the breeze, once his feet touched the plateau. But his anxiety was sufficient to cause him to

reach to the tool box, and extract a rather long alligator-jaw wrench, which he had in his mind as the most suitable weapon of defense, in case of an emergency, in which one of those old pirates of the air figured.

Angry shouts came from the rear. Of course it was the very last despicable little scheme of the baffled plotters, by which they hoped to disconcert Frank enough to cause him to make a bad landing, so that they might come swinging along in time to fly the flag first.

But Frank was not built that way. It would have to be something much greater than a few harmless hoots, to cause him to lose his head, especially when so very important a result depended on his nice judgment.

He had calculated to a fraction of a foot just how far above the plateau the monoplane was situated, so that when he shut off the engine they would drop lightly just where he figured.

And Andy knew how to apply the drag brake, so as to haul up in a short distance.

All the same it must have been a moment of extreme anxiety to both of the daring young aviators. They had victory within their grasp, and in another few seconds it would be clinched and riveted, when their

flag flew from the crown of the now conquered Old Thunder Top, that had so long defied all attempts at mastery.

Just as Frank had figured the monoplane glided down after the engine was stopped, and touched the rocks as gently as ever he had come to earth, running along on the three bicycle wheels, jolting over the rough surface, yet gradually coming to a standstill, as the brake got in its work.

Indeed, the aeroplane had not actually come to a stop before Andy was out of his seat, and wildly flaunting the flag that had been given him by the head of the sports committee. He knew that every eye far away was riveted on the spot, and that since the biplane was still afloat, those who had glasses could readily see how the other air craft had landed first, and hence won the race.

Of course Andy shouted like a young cowboy; he would hardly have been human not to have found some such outlet for the pent-up emotions that were threatening to suffocate him.

And naturally enough, those victorious whoops must have been so like gall and wormwood to the disheartened pair just about to alight on the plateau, a quarter of a minute after the victors had taken possession.

Frank knew too that there must be the added consciousness of having attempted a nasty trick, and failed! There is possibly no meaner feeling that can overwhelm a boy than to realize that he has tried to down a rival through trickery, that must have been apparent to many eyes, and failed.

But Frank's was a generous nature. Even then he was resolved not to press the charge against his defeated rivals. No harm had resulted from the contemptible endeavor to delay or injure them; and doubtless already Puss must regret that he had ever allowed himself to conspire with Sandy to carry it out. Surely he could not have realized what a terrible thing it was they had attempted. Let it go as an accident then; but all the same Frank was bound to make sure that he did not again sail the upper currents under any sort of an air craft which either Puss Carberry or Sandy Hollingshead piloted.

The others managed to alight on the plateau, though their momentum was enough to have carried them over the other edge had not Frank, who had left his own machine, laid hold and held the biplane back.

Puss looked white and confused. Sandy, on the other hand, scowled, and clenched his hands menacingly, as though so sore over his

defeat that he was almost tempted to rush on the cheering bearer of the flag, and have it out with him there on the very apex of Old Thunder Top.

Possibly the sight of that long alligator-jaw wrench which Andy still clutched in his right hand may have deterred the belligerent Sandy, though his face continued to work spasmodically, as though he might be saying things not at all complimentary to the object of his aversion.

Suddenly Frank gave utterance to a shout. Faintly on the air came the uproarious cheering of the tremendous throng, away down yonder on the aviation field, as they saw the humiliation of the once proud Thunder Top; but it was not in connection with this that Frank gave tongue.

"Look out!" he cried, "the eagle!"

Sandy Hollingsworth happened to be the one picked out by the angry bird, upon whom to first try his claws and beak. The boy turned at Frank's cry, and just managed to throw his arm up to screen his face from the attack. But the heavy bird struck him with tremendous force so that Sandy was hurled over upon the rocks, and more or less bruised and cut.

Andy ran toward him, bent on defending

the prostrate lad from any further attack on the part of the enraged feathered king of the air. Then he stopped short, gaped at something that lay there on the rocks, having fallen undoubtedly from one of Sandy's coat pockets when he was sent sprawling; and with a shrill laugh Andy snatched the object up in his hand.

"Frank, looky here would you! Just think of me finding it up on Old Thunder Top!"

And Frank stared, as well he might, for his chum was holding up the missing little aluminum monkey wrench for which he had so long searched everywhere.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PROVEN GUILTY—CONCLUSION.

“Hurrah! found at last! Didn’t I tell you I’d run it down sooner or later, Frank? And just to think that this sneak had it all the while; grabbed it some time when perhaps it fell out of my pocket. It’s the greatest thing ever! I’m glad I came up here!”

So Andy kept on crying, to the secret amusement of his cousin. Evidently the other found more real joy in the sudden and unexpected recovery of his missing monkey wrench, than in the great victory which the little monoplane had won.

“Look out! There come both of them, Andy! Drop flat!” he yelled, as he saw the circling eagles start to swoop down again.

Andy just saved himself by following directions, for one of the eagles barely missed him. Sandy was sitting up, and rubbing the back of his head, where it had come in contact with the hard rock. He appeared half dazed, and evidently there was little use demanding any explanation as to how the precious tool chanced to be in his possession. Truth to tell, Andy never did find out, and had to jump at conclusions.

The great birds continued to wheel and dart at the intruders, so that all of the boys were soon engaged in defending themselves.

"They think we mean to rob their nest of the two eaglets you can see there," was Frank's explanation. "Perhaps if we go over to the other side of the plateau they may haul off, and let us embark again. I wouldn't like to hurt them, boys."

"And I'd kill the whole outfit, if I had my way," grumbled Sandy, whose clothes were torn and marked with blood, where the sharp talons of the furious bird had clawed along his person.

"Oh! well, we'll leave you here to clean 'em out, if you say so," remarked Puss, who was himself anxious to get down from that dizzy height as soon as possible, and feeling ugly toward all creation, as fellows who make a bad mess of things usually are.

"Not much you don't," said Sandy quickly. "I'm going when you get good and ready, bet your life on it. Wouldn't ketch me staying up here alone. Wow! even if I had a rope long enough to reach down, I'd be afraid to chance it. Come along, Puss, we ain't got no call to stay here any longer. Let's vamoze."

The biplane was the first to start off, and Frank was a little nervous as to whether the

thing could be successfully navigated in so short a space. But nothing went wrong, and presently those who manned the other aeroplane also took their places and made the trial.

The flag had been left fluttering in the breeze, Andy having fixed the short pole in a crevice of the rocks, where he could wedge it fast. With the aid of any fairly decent glasses it could be seen from town; and would doubtless serve to stimulate many boys in the endeavor to accomplish some similar feat of daring.

The eagles were still soaring in great circles, now rising, and again swooping down on their broad pinions. Frank even feared that they might take a notion to strike the strange bird that had dared invade their eyrie home; but evidently the eagles had come to the wise conclusion that they need fear nothing from the visit of the two aeroplanes, for they followed them but a short distance, to return, and perching on a crag give utterance to what might be called a victorious scream.

"Say, what d'ye think of that?" demanded Andy, laughing as the sound floated to them while speeding along. "They reckon they've licked us, good and plenty."

"Well," said Frank, quickly, "so they have in one sense, for we gave up the field to ~~them~~

But looks to me as though Puss and Sandy somehow don't want to return to the aviation field. They're veering off as if they meant to go home."

"Humph! guess that's the best thing they could do anyhow, after what happened!" grunted Andy.

"Meaning that sand bag they let drop?" remarked his cousin. "If I were you, Andy, I wouldn't say anything about that, unless asked. Perhaps it was an accident, and they didn't mean to do us any harm."

"Accident! You know just as well as I do, Frank Bird, that it was meant, every time," exploded the impulsive Andy. "It's just the kind of dirty trick Puss and his cowardly shadow are always playing on those they don't like."

"Well, could you swear to it?" asked Frank.

"On general principles, yes I could," answered the other, shaking his head in an obstinate fashion.

"Then you saw Sandy unfasten the cord, or cut it loose?" Frank went on.

"No—no, I can hardly go as far as that. He seemed to be handling the bag, and I just guessed what he had in mind," Andy admitted.

“Well, since we couldn’t prove our assertion it would be better to keep mum on the subject. They’ll hatch up a story, and swear they were just going to cast the bag overboard, thinking they might hit up a faster pace, and didn’t see us below. You ought to know Puss Carberry by this time; did you ever see him wanting a good excuse for anything he did? And he can put on such an innocent face, too. Let it drop, Andy. We won, and can afford to be generous, you know.”

Andy could never stand out against this convincing tone of Frank’s.

“Oh! all right, if you say so, Frank, though I think you’re by long odds too easy on the skunks. Why, if that bag had struck us in a certain way, we might be as dead as herrings long before now. Makes me shiver every time I look down. And after a fall of more than a thousand feet, a fellow wouldn’t look good at his own funeral. But since you say forget it, I’ll try to.”

When they hovered over the big field there was a whirlwind of shouts that must have been pleasant music to these two young victorious air voyagers returning from their recent exploit.

The next half hour was filled with plenty

of excitement all around. Frank had to guard his precious little monoplane from the crowds of curious and applauding people who had witnessed their plucky race.

And the silver cup was indeed a beauty, well worth all the effort they had put into their work. No one was more extravagant in praise than Colonel Josiah Whympers, who toddled around with crutch and cane, telling everybody he met what wonderful things Andy and Frank were going to do some day. While most people were of the opinion that he "put the cart before the horse" when using those two names in that fashion, still they could forgive him, because Andy was naturally everything to the doting old man.

Of course after that it was demanded that the Bird boys give a few exhibition flights, just to let the gaping crowd see to what an astonishing degree the modern aviator could guide his novel craft through the air.

So Frank ascended to a height of nearly fifteen hundred feet, boring his way upward after a fashion much in vogue among these pilots who lead the world in aerial navigation; after which he descended in spirals, being averse to attempting the risky stunt known as volplaning, until he had learned the ropes better.

But it was all a grand circus for the thousands who viewed these wonderful feats for the first time. And great was the uproarious applause that greeted the young aviators after they had landed again.

Before evening came the Bird boys once more went up, and headed for the home field, tired but satisfied.

Dr. Bird had insisted that Frank come home for the night, since he had been away so very long now.

"I guess there's no danger about the monoplane," Frank remarked, as they locked the doors, and Andy for the twentieth time drew out his recovered little monkey wrench to examine it carefully. "You know Chief Waller nabbed those two men, Jules and ~~Joe~~, and has them locked up tight. Besides, now that the race is over, Puss and Sandy will have no reason to want to injure our machine."

"Perhaps not," said Andy, "but Colonel Josiah ain't going to take any risks. He told me he had hired a watchman to sleep here in the shed every night, just as long as we want. I'm going to hang around and wait for him. I don't trust Puss or his crony one little bit."

"Well," said Frank, as he prepared to depart on his wheel, "we've had a grand day

of it, old fellow; and I doubt if we ever see such a great time again."

"Just what I was thinking," replied Andy, half regretfully, as though he felt badly because all pleasant things must have an end. "There'll be no more races for us to win, and things will get mighty humdrum, unless something turns up shortly."

Little did either of the Bird boys, fresh from their victory of the air, dream of the astonishing adventures that were soon to fall to their portion, beside which those they had experienced, as narrated between the covers of this book, would appear almost insignificant. In good time the reader may be taken into our confidence, and allowed to share in the knowledge of those stirring times that is ~~in~~ **our** possession.

A few days later Frank and Andy happened to be among a group of boys gathered on the campus in front of the high school building. Although school had long since been dismissed for the summer vacation, still the boys often congregated here by the famous Bloomsbury school fence, to talk over things in general, such as interested lads in a country town.

Baseball matters were being discussed, and the possibilities of a good football season in

the Fall. Frank and Andy were not so deeply interested in these matters as usual though they did not see fit to tell their friends just why.

Frank had been watching for an opportunity to carry out a little scheme he had in mind, and which he had talked over with Andy, Elephant Small, Larry Geohegan, and one or two other good fellows.

"Here he comes, Frank!" said Andy finally, as Puss Carberry and his eternal shadow, Sandy Hollingshead, were seen approaching from the direction of town.

Just as they were passing Larry stepped forward.

"I say, Puss, does this belong to you?" and he held out a card—none other than the one which had been found in the hangar of the monoplane the day after that trick of cutting the canvas of the planes had been accomplished.

Puss was for once taken off his guard.

"Why, yes, I believe it does, Larry," he said, immediately pulling out a pack of fine cards. "You know I brought these up with me from the city. See, it has the Indian on the back, and the words 'Red Hunter.' I'll run them over, and see if the jack of spades is missing."

He did so in an adept manner that told how accustomed he was to handling such things.

"You see, it is missing," he said triumphantly, "so I'll thank you for returning my black jack to me. Where did you pick it up, Larry?"

"Oh! you're not indebted to me for its return," declared Larry, turning up his nose in disgust. "Frank here found it; he can tell you just where."

And Puss grew fairly scarlet, he hardly knew why himself, as he turned his gaze upon the accusing face on the one whom he had done so much to injure.

"You dropped it out of your pocket the night you visited our hangar, and cut the canvas of our monoplane wings to flinders. I have been saving it for you. Thank you, Puss, for admitting that you were the author of that dirty trick," and Frank turned his back on the confused rogue.

Unable to frame a reply, Puss and his crony walked hastily away. And before night the whole of Bloomsbury knew of what they had been guilty; because Larry and Elephant refused to keep it to themselves.

But it was not to be expected that this would cause such fellows as Puss Carberry or Sandy Hollingshead to see the error of their

ways. On the contrary, it was only apt to make them the more bitter against the Bird boys; and in time to come they would wish more than ever that they could find some way by means of which they might injure those who had so skillfully guided their little air craft to victory in the race to the crest of Old Thunder Top.

Whether that opportunity would ever come, as well as many other things in the line of adventure which were fated to befall the Bird boys, must be left to another volume, which the reader, who has followed our venturesome young aviators thus far, will be pleased to know has already been issued under the title of "The Bird Boys on the Wing; or, Aeroplane Chums in the Tropics."

THE END.

JACOB SNEYDER'S TEST.

PEOPLE who are in the habit of enclosing money in ordinary letters to be sent by mail ought to correct themselves as they should of any other bad habit. While a person might follow the practice for a lifetime without injury to himself, the chances are more than even that, sooner or later, he will meet with, perhaps, a serious loss.

A friend of mine, who had unconsciously fell into this way of doing business, and who had followed it for many years without annoyance or loss, one day enclosed a hundred dollar bill to his wife with instructions for the lady to pay the taxes. The letter miscarried and the money was lost, while the taxes were still unpaid on the last day. Experience, which is often a cruel teacher, thus taught him the simple lesson I am now endeavoring to teach you.

If you could have seen the thousands of complaints of losses of this kind that I have seen in my time, you would not wonder that I charge you to turn from the evil practice which is indulged in by so many of our people. While all of the ordinary letters that are lost are not stolen, many of them are, especially if they contain money.

The thief in the postal service is the exception ; but is it any wonder that men, appointed as they are, because of no especial qualifications for the work they are to perform, should now and then turn out to be bad? We occasionally hear of such things in the higher walks of life, where men are supposed to be selected and retained for their fitness.

Then again, the ordinary letter thief has opportunities unequalled for his nefarious operations. Thousands of letters a day are passing through his skilful hands, which have passed through, or which are to pass through many other hands before they are properly delivered. He can slyly steal a few and who can tell which one of the many took them?

The ordinary letter thief works in a fertile field that knows no bounds ; and the remorse, the heart-aches and disappointments that follow his villainous endeavors no pen can describe. The thieves are not all caught, but eventually most of them come to grief.

They are the most dangerous class of dishonest employés in the postal service, and the postmaster or other officer who has reason to suspect one, and who, instead of dismissing him, does not report his suspicions where they will receive attention, commits a grave mistake.

The people from one end of the country to the other, as well as the thousands of honest employés, are vitally interested in his arrest and conviction. In my judgment there should be no mercy shown him, and the Department should bend every energy and

spend every dollar necessary to turn him over to the tender mercy of an upright judge.

Frequently he becomes so skilled in his work that days and weeks are devoted in the search for him, and then days and possibly weeks are devoted in efforts to catch him. Almost always he is one that nobody ever suspected. Usually he is a person who stands well with his working associates, and who has been an ornament in the circle of his home friends and companions.

The very nature of his aims have made him sharp and cunning, but his friends and family have never noticed it. To illustrate how proficient they sometimes become, allow me to relate the little story of Jacob Sneyder.

Jacob was an assorting clerk in the post-office in Chicago, and, during his palmy days at the case, many ordinary letters containing money were being lost. After a few weeks, as Stuart would say, it was "a cold day" when thirty or forty complaints were not received.

In that office alone were five hundred or more clerks and carriers who could have stolen the letters, yet in all probability four hundred and ninety-nine of them were honest and would not steal. Stuart and others worked days and nights ceaselessly, trying to locate the five hundreth man, and finally decided that Jake Sneyder, one of the oldest in point of service, and one of the best in knowledge and rapidity, was guilty of all.

They had not seen him steal, but they had discovered certain unmistakable signs, known only to those

whose business it had been for years to locate crimes of this character.

It did not seem hardly possible that a man of Sneyder's make-up and social standing could be a thief, but actions spoke louder than the kind words of those who had always known him, and it was not long ere he fell before the strong glare of positive proof, and became a prisoner, in burning tears of unwilling submission.

In his confession that followed he told how he had successfully carried on his operations so long, and related with much interest how skillful experience had made him. He could tell, he said, by the touch of an ordinary letter whether or not it contained money.

He did not ask that any-one believe the improbable statement unless he was given an opportunity to demonstrate its truthfulness. He asked that a hundred letters be prepared and that in only one of them there should be placed a dollar bill, and he would pick out the one that contained the money.

The test was prepared, and in two of the letters, instead of one, was placed a dollar each. The package was handed to Sneyder, who to the surprise of everybody present, handled the letters rapidly, as if assorting them in a case, and when he reached the only two that contained money he threw them out, and, turning to his interested auditors, triumphantly asked : "How vas dot for high?"

Jacob did not think it was so very high, when three days later Judge Blodgett told him in plain, common English, that he believed they could dispense with his valuable services for about four years.

PROFESSOR CURTIS. OF SYRACUSE.

PICTURE in your mind's eye an Apollo, who, like the mythological and classical son of Jupiter, was a god of eloquence, medicine, and the fine arts, and it may aid you in mentally grasping the character known as Professor Curtis, who flourished for a brief period in Syracuse, N. Y., about the year '87 in the nineteenth century.

The Professor belonged to a well-known family in Buffalo by the name of Osgood, and when I remark that the Osgood family was a great family, not one of the thousands who knew the family will gainsay the observation. The head of this remarkable family was probably the noblest Roman of them all, and, like Hercules, the famous hero of antiquity, was celebrated for his size and strength.

The fair-haired Professor was the monarch's eldest, and, at the time of which I write, was seven and twenty. He possessed the neck and shoulders, and possibly a few of the more prominent characteristics of his worthy sire; but, unlike the swarthy parent, his skin was fair, his eyes were blue, his face was beardless, his cheeks were rosy, his hands were white

and soft, and, in the language of Dick Swiveller, he was a "flower."

Frequently he had been known to drop the honored family name, which had become familiar in the land, and assume some other, which the scribes and pharisees were unused to. This had been done, I regret to say, for the purposes of deception—to better enable him to fill his coffers from the pockets of the unwary and unsuspecting, who are everywhere. You may infer from this that he practiced to deceive, which inference will be correct, for the art of deception was among the finest of which he was the haughty master.

It would be a tireless task even to attempt to give you in one small volume the multitude of names he had been known by, and the various places in which he had practiced; so I have concluded to allude briefly and solely to his masquerades under the delusive title of Professor Curtis, of Syracuse, Mandana and Camillus.

Sometime during the early portion of the year named, a small room on the top floor of the Weiting block, in Syracuse, was rented for a few weeks by a stranger, who gave no reference, and on the following day a small sign, which read, "Empire News Company," was hung on the door. In this little room, and under this business-like cover, Professor Curtis, his brother, and somebody who called himself Roberts, but whose right name God only knows, assembled to promulgate the Professor's latest racket.

They first mailed to two or three thousand newspaper publishers, outside of the State of New York, two small advertisements, for the publication of which

for thirteen weeks, on the local page, next to pure reading matter, the publisher would receive one copy of Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, bound in sheep.

This proposition was exactly what many publishers had been waiting for (the professor knew it), and fully fifteen hundred embraced the golden opportunity. The advertisements were headed "Bargains in Music," and "Another Art Craze," which described articles that would be forwarded on receipt of price by the Empire News Co., principal office, Syracuse, N. Y., U. S. A.

These propositions had scarcely passed out of the Syracuse post-office before two or three thousand others followed, which promised an Unabridged Dictionary for an eight weeks' publication of two other short advertisements, which were headed "Ladies Guide to Fancy Work," and "Ladies, look here." These also described something that would be forwarded on receipt of the price by the Empire News Company, principal office, Syracuse, N. Y., U. S., A. This proposition, you will observe, was much more liberal than the first, and, therefore, was accepted by eighteen hundred papers.

But those propositions and advertisements were merely feelers to prepare the way for the grandest conception of the Professor's brilliant career. The following alluring decoy was then dropped to the entire list of previously favored publishers, and the same will bring a smile from at least the few who have not previously seen it :

CHRISTIAN HERALD :—Mr. Roberts is perfectly reliable.

CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE :—Prompt and reliable in all his dealings, Mr. Roberts is entitled to public confidence.

BAPTIST :—Mr. Roberts is a gentleman with whom it is a pleasure to transact business.

Office of C. H. ROBERTS, Advertising Manager for the
Empire News Co. General Advertising Agent.

SYRACUSE, N. Y., Feb. 23d, 1887.

TO PUBLISHER :—

Dear Sir :—For the insertion of the three following advertisements Four Months (without change) per directions TO PRINTER, I will send you one set of CHAMBER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA, in six volumes, bound in sheep, library style, the price of which is \$24.00. The books will be shipped when advertising is half completed and the express charges are to be paid by you. Advise me of your acceptance of proposition and address me as ADV. AGENT so as not to confound this order with that of the Empire News Company. You will please observe directions carefully, so as to avoid unnecessary correspondence.

Very truly yours,

C. H. ROBERTS, Advertising Agent.

N. B.—Publishers with whom we have accounts will be furnished with any books known to the trade at reasonable prices to apply on advertising.

TO PRINTER :—Set all of the following advertisements as nearly as possible like copy with heavy displayed headings. They must be inserted immediately following or along side of pure reading matter, all to be run FOUR MONTHS (without change) and only one to be inserted in the SAME column. Follow directions carefully.

After you have feasted on the above sublime work of art allow me to call your interested attention to something in the medicine line, which appears in the form of the three advertisements, referred to above by the "perfectly reliable," yet unknown Roberts. These appeared in probably fifteen hundred papers :

ABUSED WIVES

Or maiden ladies suffering from any form of female complaint, sick or nervous headache, liver or kidney troubles, CAN BE RESTORED TO PERFECT HEALTH by Prof. Curtis' Iozone Treatment, which is the greatest boon for women ever discovered. It makes no difference what you have taken or who has failed to cure you. One trial of this treatment will always convince an entire community. The more desperate the case the more convincing are its merits. During the next thirty days one five dollar treatment will be delivered to any lady in the United States FREE who sends both express and post-office address and fifty cents to cover charges, boxing and delivery. In ordering ask for "Treatment A."

Address CURTIS IOZONE COMPANY,
Syracuse, N. Y.

ARE YOU NERVOUS ?

Or do you suffer from indescribable feelings, both mental and physical ? Have you overworked or from other cause become debilitated ? Do you lack ambition, strength and vitality from any cause ? If so afflicted or if troubled with disease of any nature send a self-addressed stamped envelope, with description of case, for full information concerning Professor Curtis' IOZONE TREATMENT. It is

endorsed by the clergy, the press, the medical profession and all intelligent persons who have investigated its merits. A five dollar treatment delivered free to one person in every town. Give both express and post-office address and enclose fifty cents to cover charges, boxing and delivery. In ordering ask for "Treatment B."

Address CURTIS IOZONE COMPANY,

Syracuse, N. Y.

CATARRH CURE.

Professor Curtis has thoroughly demonstrated by his great discovery of Iozone that this dreadful disease can be quickly and permanently cured. It makes no difference if the case has become chronic or medicines have failed. The Iozone Treatment will cure it every time. It is neither drugs nor snuff, and should not be classed with patent nostrums. To introduce this new treatment on its merits we will deliver, charges prepaid, one regular five dollar treatment FREE to any catarrh sufferer in the United States who sends us at once both express and post-office address and fifty cents to cover charges, boxing and delivery. In ordering ask for "Treatment C."

Address CURTIS IOZONE COMPANY,

Syracuse, N. Y.

The results of skillful advertising were probably never better illustrated than in this particular instance. Soon the mails were swollen with letters for The Empire News Company and the Curtis Iozone Company, and it was truly astonishing to see how many responsive chords the professor had touched with his magic wand. It was evident that the fool-killer had not made a tour of the country for some

time, or else, as Gilbert, the observing postmaster said, the people were crazy to get something for nothing, and thereby had been inveigled into a device from which they receive nothing for something.

And the foolish publishers—those wise guardians of the people against the false whims and crooked schemes of the confidence man and the designing knave! What kind word can I add that will in a measure compensate them for their disappointment in not receiving a single dictionary or encyclopedia, or even an answer to a single letter asking for them? Not one.

The Professor—the silver-tongued god of eloquence, medicine, and the fine arts—tarried in Syracuse till the low rumbling of distant thunder admonished him of the approaching storm, when he, like the slippery Arab, folded his tent and silently stole away—to Minneapolis, leaving his younger brother to battle with the warring elements a while longer, when he too, was to silently steal away, and follow.

But the storm gathered sooner than it had on previous threatening occasions, and just as the brother had packed all there ever was of the Empire News Company and the Curtis Iozone Company in one small trunk, and was about to step aboard a west bound New York central flyer, smiling Justice laid her warm hand upon his shoulder, and through the eloquent interpreter Dosser, said, "Don't go," and, like meek Moses, he gracefully consented to remain.

When the elegant Apollo reached Minneapolis he induced another brother (it was a great family), who was himself a professor—a dancing master—and a

young man named Archdeacon, who did not have a dollar, but who expected something from his father in far-away England, to allow themselves to be known as The Northwestern News Co. of Minneapolis. This Company (?) rented another fifth floor room, and its sole object of pretended existence was to buy out The Empire News Company and the Curtis Iozone Company of Syracuse, and to receive the mail that the combination had ordered forwarded when the storm in Syracuse became tempestuous.

The first lot forwarded from Syracuse after Alfred B. Osgood, (who by oversight had not changed his name,) had been arrested, contained thirteen hundred letters and two thousand postal cards. These letters like the others that followed, when they reached Minneapolis were by the carriers shoved through a hole in the door of the office of The Northwestern News Company, where they were quietly opened by Professor Curtis, who pocketed the money and looked wise. These strange proceedings so frightened the dancing master that he ran away to Kansas City, while poor Archdeacon, without waiting for his money from Wales, actually took to the woods. Did Professor Curtis also flee? Not then.

By this time he had, under his own name, William Gardner Osgood, established a daily paper, and by the time I arrived in Minneapolis he had sold it to a rival, and had swindled very many people with whom he had had dealings. The atmosphere of Minneapolis had really become too oppressive for him, and, having cracked all of the golden eggs that had fallen into The Northwestern News Company's basket, and

having heard that he was wanted in Syracuse, he purchased a ticket, the day I arrived, and fled to that asylum for American thieves, robbers, and plunderers—Canada.

In due time Alfred B. Osgood was arraigned for trial in the United States court, in Albany, before Judge Coxe. The trial lasted two days, during which time very many interesting details were brought out. The court room was constantly packed. Judge Slow, of Buffalo, assisted by the able elder Osgood, and a sprig from Minneapolis, were the polished counsel for the defendant; while District Attorney Lockwood, aided by his assistants, Mr. Hoyt and Colonel Welch, took charge of the prosecution.

When Judge Slow wiped the perspiration from his brow, took a refreshing quaff, and entered the arena to address the jury, he was the image of a vanquished hero. Yet, being conscious of a solemn duty to perform, he gently pressed the lever, and soon had soared into the mystical realms of blissful imagination. His allegorical flight was prolonged for nearly two short hours, during which time he had painted and repainted in crimson and gold the immortal and spotless beauties of charity and sympathy, and, at last, when he wiped his tear-stained eyes and took his seat, it occurred to many that he had omitted to mention the Syracuse fraud case.

When this interesting and instructive panoramic scene had been carefully rolled away, another was introduced, which was different. When Mr. Lockwood arose to speak all eyes were turned to see, and all ears were turned to hear, and there was silence in the

court. Here was a man—a noble man—who had been a neighbor of the defendant's father, and who had watched with pain for many years the tangled webs the sons were weaving. He knew it all. What would he say? There was so much that he could say, and so little that he ought, perhaps, to say, that, to some, he appeared puzzled.

He confined himself, however, closely to the evidence, which in itself contained enough hard and ludicrous facts to form the basis of a master address. His vivid pictures of the meek defendant, the gorgeous professor, and the unknown and mysterious Roberts, who had conspired to rob, by use of the mails, were alike charming and pathetic. He indulged in no fancy flights; he called things by their right names; his shots were aimed at the bull's-eye every time, and in just forty-two minutes by the clock he had knocked the Syracuse fraud case sky-high, and had snatched away the glittering habiliments of deception from the interesting trio, which he held, as he turned to take his seat and receive the generous congratulations of the entire assemblage.

There was little left to be done. The judge addressed the jurors briefly, who scarcely left their seats before agreeing upon a verdict of guilty, and five minutes later the young man arose and was sentenced to prison. It was a sad scene, as such scenes generally are; but there would have been no tinge of sadness had Professor Curtis, of Toronto, been present to have received just a little of the reward that is awaiting him.

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